



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 61.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE MASKED DRIVER

OR
THE FATAL RUN THROUGH DEATH'S CANYON



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

GIANT GEORGE DREW HIS REVOLVER AND FIRED AT CODY, BUT HIS AIM WAS NOT TRUE, AND BUFFALO BILL'S BULLET PIERCED THE BIG RUFFIAN'S BREAST.



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No. 61.

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Buffalo Bill and the Masked Driver;

OR,

THE FATAL RUN THROUGH DEATH CANYON.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOUT'S REQUEST.

Buffalo Bill had just returned to Fort Rest after a long scout in order to ascertain whether or not the Indians were planning any attack on the post.

As he drew his horse to a halt upon the parade grounds a cheer came from the crowd assembled there.

"Buffalo Bill will soon set things straight again!"

"He's the only man who can send ther coach through in safety!"

"We're glad to see yer back ag'in, Bill, fer we needs yer!"

These were the shouts that came from the group that was collecting about the great scout.

"What's up, pards?" he asked, cheerily.

"The coach hes been held up again!"

"And ther driver killed!"

"And ther passengers robbed!"

These were the answers that came from twenty throats.

Buffalo Bill's face darkened with anger.

The coach which ran from Fort Rest to another frontier post—Fort Famine—through a gorge known as Death's Cañon had been held up repeatedly before, no less than four drivers being killed in succession.

Then Buffalo Bill himself had taken the reins in hand and driven the coach through the gorge.

It was attacked, but the scout, who was the only occupant of the coach, expected an attack, and was prepared for it.

The five outlaws who made the attack met their death that day.

Then Buffalo Bill, after driving the coach through, left the fort on a scout, thinking that he had cleared the road of outlaws and that the coaches could go in safety from that time on.

But now when he returned he found that the murders and robberies had broken out again.

At that moment an orderly pushed his way through the crowd.

"Colonel Miles wishes to see you whenever you are at leisure."

Colonel Miles was the commandant at Fort Rest, and it was not long before he was greeting the great scout heartily, overjoyed at his safe return from his perilous mission.

The scout listened carefully to the reports the colonel read of the latest stagecoach robbery, and then for a moment appeared to be lost in deep thought.

Then he suddenly raised his head and spoke:

"I shall have a driver here in the morning who will take the coach through in safety."

"Who is he?"

"That is the secret, sir, I must keep from every one, and so I ask that he may wear a mask, and, more, colonel, please give me a pass to allow my unknown to go and come at will from and to the fort."

The request of the chief of scouts fairly astounded the colonel, to judge from his looks.

"You wish to send a masked driver out upon the coach, and to have me give him a pass that allows him to enter and leave the fort at will?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is as I understood you, Cody."

"It is as I meant it, sir."

"This is a remarkable request."

"I admit it, sir, and I wish that I could now explain my reasons, but I cannot."

"But will you answer me a question?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do not do so if it is going to compromise you in this matter of your masked driver, for I'll excuse you if you deem it best not to answer."

"I will answer it, sir, if I can."

"Well, tell me if this masked driver is one of my officers, one from the fort?"

"He is not, sir."

"Is he from Fort Famine?"

"He is not, sir."

"Well, I will grant the request, Cody."

"Thank you, sir."

"How do you wish the pass written?"

The colonel turned toward his desk and took up a pen.

Then Buffalo Bill said:

All guards, scouts and sentinels of Fort Rest, and Fort Famine, pass the masked bearer in and out of all military lines in my district, and to lend him any aid he may require at the hands of those under my command.

"A well-worded special order, Cody, for your masked unknown; but it shall go as you dictate," and the colonel signed, sealed and delivered it to Buffalo Bill, who thanked him warmly for the document, placing it carefully away in his pocket.

"Do you have hopes, Cody, of seeing your masked driver alive after he leaves the fort?" asked the colonel, with a smile.

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Well, I have not, after what has happened."

"I have another favor to ask, colonel?"

"What, another?"

"Yes, sir; I would like a leave of absence, sir, for a month."

"What! Buffalo Bill ask for a leave of absence in the face of the enemy?"

"It is not to go far, sir, only to be at liberty to go and come at will, for I do not wish to be hampered by duties in the fort just now."

"It shall be as you wish, Cody, for I am sure you are aiming at dead center in what you are doing now."

"I am trying to do my duty, sir—the work you have set me upon."

"I can believe that without reserve."

"Thank you, sir."

"When do you wish your leave to begin?"

"To-night, sir."

"For one month?"

"Yes, sir."

The colonel turned again to his desk and wrote a special leave of absence for the scout, who took it with an expression of thanks.

"Now, you do not wish an escort to go with your new man, Cody?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Suppose he is killed?"

"He must take his chances as the other brave fellows have done, sir, who have driven the Fatal Trail."

"And he has the pluck to do it?"

"He has, sir."

"I wish to make his acquaintance some day."

"I trust I shall have the pleasure of bringing him to meet you, Colonel Miles," was the response of Buffalo Bill, who then took his leave, going to the stage station to see who it was that had brought the coach in from Trail End City.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASKED DRIVER.

Buffalo Bill found that the driver who had brought the coach up from Trail End City, the point at which the coach line ended, was Brighton, a man well-known along the Overland stage runs as a brave fellow, who could handle the reins to perfection.

"Well, Bill, I'm here, and come through without a mishap, I'm glad to say," said the driver.

"I'm glad of it, Brighton, and hope you will have no trouble on your part of the run."

"Who's ter take the coach on ter Famine, Bill?"

"I have a man who will be here on time in the morning."

"What did yer say his name were?"

"I didn't say."

"But yer knows?"

"He is an unknown."

"Ah! and maybe he won't do it."

"Well, pard, you will be here at the fort to see whether he does or not, and you will take the coach back to Trail End City, when he brings it here from Fort Famine."

"If he does."

"I admit that the chances are against him, but then he is going to try."

"He kin do no more than that, Pard Bill," said Brighton, and with this the two parted, the scout going to his quarters for supper.

Later, after "Lights Out," had resounded through the fort, Buffalo Bill came out of his quarters and made his way to the stockade gate which was known as "the colonel's gate."

He opened this with a key that he had and passed out, locking it behind him, for no sentinel was kept there.

Out upon the plains he walked for a quarter of a mile, to where was a cottonwood tree standing alone.

As he approached a man stepped out from its shadow and greeted him.

"I came as you directed, Bill, and I think I have some news for you," he said.

"All right, pard, we'll talk it over when you are safe inside my quarters."

"I have the key of the colonel's private gate in the stockade and we will go in that way."

"But first, for fear of accidents, let me give you this paper of protection which the colonel gave me for you."

"Ah! he knows then——"

"Nothing."

"He does not know who I am?"

"He does not, nor does any one else save myself."

"Good!"

"I am ready."

Buffalo Bill led the way, or rather they walked along together, approaching the stockade at the point where they were not visible in the darkness to the sentinels on either side of the wall.

The scout unlocked the door, the two entered, and relocking it, a couple of heavy bars were put up that secured it more firmly, though the gate so fitted into the wall of timber as to hardly be noticed by daylight.

Crossing to the parade ground Buffalo Bill and his companion skirted along an obscure path and, avoiding several whom they saw, made their way to the other end of the stockade, where in a corner was the scout's quarters, the cabin of Buffalo Bill fronting the barracks of the men and being well located for observing all that went on in the fort.

They reached the cabin without being halted, and entering it Buffalo Bill struck a match and lighted a candle.

By this light it was seen that the stranger wore a mask which completely covered his face from view.

He was a large man, erect, with the bearing of a soldier, wore gauntlet gloves, top boots and a complete suit of buckskin.

A silk handkerchief concealed his neck, so that there was not a particle of his skin visible to show whether his complexion was that of a paleface or Indian, and his head was sheltered by a hood sombrero.

Such in appearance was the unknown man whom Buffalo Bill had gotten to drive the deadly trail that led through Death's Cañon.

He was to be known only as the Masked Driver of the Fatal Trail, and who he was no one could guess from looking at him.

"All is ready for you to take the coach out to-morrow, pard," said the scout.

"And I am ready to do so," was the calm reply, and the two sat down to have supper together, after which they sought their blankets for a good night's rest, as though they both fully recognized what was before them upon the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNKNOWN TAKES THE REINS.

The stage horn calling, as was the custom, for the passengers to get ready for the start, brought many to the station to see the coach go on its way.

The horn was blown half an hour before starting time, and a large crowd of soldiers, scouts and hangers-on were gathering there, impelled by curiosity to see who the daring driver was that would thus go to certain death, as all believed.

Officers were there, and their wives and children, and to the surprise of many, Colonel Miles came sauntering down to the scene, accompanied by Captain May and several of his staff.

The colonel also felt a desire to have a look at this bold driver who was unknown to him, and who he well knew would be masked, through some strange whim of his own and Buffalo Bill's.

The horses were hitched up, the stable boys stood at their heads, and the agent was at his post, but no driver had yet appeared.

There were no passengers, for not a soul would risk the drive through Death's Cañon after all that had happened.

The stage boss, Pete Porter by name, looked at his watch and then glanced over the crowd, when suddenly there was heard a cry:

"Here he comes!"

Then, coming from the direction of the scout's quarters, was seen a tall form making for the stage station.

Every eye was upon him; and, as he came leisurely along, he cracked a very handsome coach whip which

he carried in a manner that showed how well he knew how to handle one.

He was dressed in a suit of black corduroy, top-boots, a sombrero, wore gauntlet gloves, and had a silk handkerchief about his neck, while, strangest of all, his face was completely hidden under a sable mask.

This was a surprise to the crowd, and a murmur ran among them as to what it meant, so strange a proceeding as to be masked.

As he came up to the station a silence fell upon all. He politely saluted the colonel, who, returning the salute, eyed the masked face curiously and intently.

"You are the stage boss, sir, I believe?" he said, in a low voice, addressing Porter.

"I am, sir."

"I was told by Buffalo Bill to report to you, to take the coach out on the run to Fort Famine. It is just five minutes to starting time," and he took out a handsome gold watch and glanced at the dial.

"Yes, Buffalo Bill told me he would have a man here on time to take out the coach. You are that man?"

"I am, sir."

"What is your name?"

"My name has nothing to do with my driving, sir, so put me down as the Masked Driver of the Fatal Trail, please."

"All right; and you know what you have to face?"

"I have been told all, sir, by Mr. Cody."

"There is not one chance in ten that you get through alive."

"I thought the odds were much greater against me—say one in a thousand," was the cool reply.

"Well, you know what you are doing, I suppose, and, as I want no man to go blindfolded to death, I am glad to know you understand the peril of the drive."

"I shall take all chances, sir, of the Fatal Trail," was the prompt and decisive reply of Buffalo Bill's mysterious messenger.

"You had better leave your watch and valuables here."

"No, for they will be of no use to me if I lose my life. I risk death and robbery together on this venture."

"You are a cool one and no mistake; but, where is Cody?"

"He was granted a leave of absence, I believe."

"Well, pard, you is ther durndest fool I ever struck ter drive ther trail o' Death's Cañon, so I says good-by ter yer," and Brighton, the driver, who had listened to all that had passed, stepped forward and confronted the masked driver.

The unknown took the extended hand, and, turning to the stage boss, said:

"Any orders, sir?"

"Not any, except not to get killed."

"Time is up, then, so I'll be off."

He turned, leaped lightly up to the box, gathered up his reins, and said, pleasantly:

"Let them go, boys!"

The stablemen sprung back from the heads of the horses, and, with a crack of his whip, the Masked Driver started his team on the run of the Fatal Trail.

Every eye was upon him, and, as he wheeled his team sharply around and took the road for the main gate of the stockade, they saw that he handled the reins with masterly skill.

Then, loud and long rang out a cheer for the bold man who dared to face the danger of Death's Cañon, while Colonel Miles, as he walked back toward his quarters, sent an orderly to summon Buffalo Bill to come to him at once.

The orderly returned to headquarters, from going to the scout's quarters, to report that Buffalo Bill had gone away before dawn, it was said by one, on a scout, by another, that he had a leave of absence.

"Then he is not in the fort, orderly?"

"No, sir."

"Go and find out at what time Buffalo Bill passed the sentinel at the stockade gate, and if he was alone?"

"Yes, sir," and the orderly hastened away.

In a short while he returned, with the information that Buffalo Bill had passed out of the main stockade gate half an hour before dawn, riding one horse and leading another, the latter carrying a pack.

The orderly departing Colonel Miles turned to Captain May and said:

"I told you the favor Buffalo Bill asked of me, captain?"

"Yes, sir, to allow his driver to go masked."

"That was it, and for a leave of absence for him self."

"Yes, sir."

"Now I gave him the key to what is known as main gate in the stockade wall, and I verily believe he rode out of the fort, had some comrade awaiting him outside, and coming back through the little gate went to his quarters and rigged up as the Masked Driver."

"You think so, sir?"

"I do."

"Why so, may I ask, colonel?"

"Well, the Masked Driver came from Cody cabin."

"True, sir."

"He was about Cody's height and build."

"Very nearly, sir, I should think."

"And he was masked, wore gauntlet gloves, had even his neck concealed with that silk handkerchief he wore, and it looked very much to me as though he had his long hair done up under his sombrero."

"It might be so, colonel; but then what motive?"

would Cody have for going in a masquerading costume?"

"He well knew that I would not allow him to drive that coach again, although I did once."

"That is so, sir."

"He was determined to go through the Death's Cañon on the coach and he is not one to stop at any danger to gain his ends, and I really believe that he masqueraded just to carry his point and discover how it is all these people have been massacred, believing that he could escape once more."

"Shall I take a force and go after the coach, sir, for by hard riding I can overtake it?"

"No, as it might break in upon some plan he has, and I am confident that he has sifted this murder mystery deeper than he admits even to me. He is not alone either, I am convinced, so we might undo what he has planned by sending aid to protect him."

"That is very true, sir, and he has gone into solving this strange case with both eyes open, I feel sure. Some of his men are doubtless with him."

"Ah! there is at present not a scout out of the fort, unless he has gone with Cody, so muster the men in buckskin, Captain May, and find out just who is missing."

The captain hastened away to obey, and in an hour's time returned to headquarters.

"Cody has gone on leave, sir, the men said, to visit some one at Trail End City, or Fort Famine, they were not sure which, and he left in command C. B. Owens, whom we know best as Buckskin Charlie," he said.

"He left his orders for Buckskin Charlie to start out half the scouts to-day at noon on a run toward the Indian country, holding the balance here for a call, what he did not say, should they be quickly needed."

"And what scouts are out, captain?"

"Cody is the only one of his band now away from the fort, so Buckskin Charlie tells me, sir."

"Then who is it that Cody has aiding him, for he certainly is not alone on the trail?"

That question Captain May found it impossible to answer, for he, too, was in a quandary as to who it could be that was with Buffalo Bill on the hunt for the mysterious murderers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MASKED DRIVER'S FIRST RUN.

The Masked Driver went out of the fort in a way that showed he understood how to handle the reins over the backs of six horses in masterly style.

He saluted the officer of the day as he went through the gate, and that officer had the guard stand at a "present" to him, an honor which he said any man deserved who was taking the chances against death which the Masked Driver was doing.

On sped the coach, and it looked as though the Masked Driver knew the trail perfectly.

He halted to water his team just where it was always done, and blew the stage horn before he came in sight of the relay station, for the men to be ready to change horses.

As he drove up before the cabin he was met by Fred Fox, the station master who had charge of the relay horses, and his three assistants, who had the fresh horses ready to hitch in.

It was evident that Fred Fox was surprised, as also were his men, for he gazed with something akin to awe upon the masked face of the driver, who saluted him politely, but in silence.

"Say, pard, who be yer?" asked Foxey.

"I am the Masked Driver of Death's Cañon," was the calm response, in a deep voice.

"Does yer expect ter git through?"

"I am going through."

"Yer think so?"

"I know it."

"Many has thought thet same, and they is in the'r graves."

"They trusted those they deemed their friends, perhaps."

"But I trust no man."

"Whew! yet yer hides yer face."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It is a fancy of mine to do so."

"Well, I only hopes ye'll git through."

"Suppose you accompany me, Foxey, and see for yourself that I do."

"Not much, fer I don't run ag'in' sart'in death."

"Well, I take chances, and the man who draws trigger on me will never live to know whether his aim was good or bad."

"What does yer mean?"

"Oh, nothing, only more than two can play at the game of hide and seek, you know."

"Pard, yer is a queer one, and I hopes yer git through, for I likes yer pluck; but I doubt it."

"I'll bet you a couple of hundred to one that I go through, Foxey, and that if there is a death in the cañon on my runs I won't be the man who is buried."

"Come, put up your money."

But Foxey did not respond, but said:

"I likes yer narve, but I hain't goin' ter bet ag'in' a brave man's life."

"All right, as you please, Foxey."

"I sees that yer knows me?"

"Oh, yes, Captain Fred Fox, alias Foxey, I know you, and also your three pards there, Bradley, Bloden and Knuckles."

"Now yer does, for a fact; but we don't catch on ter who you is."

"Nor does any one else, for I drive this Death Trail masked, and the man who pulls trigger on me

does not know who it is he is killing, or what will be the result of his shot, for I am no fool, Foxey, to set myself up on this box as a target without being able to hit back."

The four men looked at each other in amazement, for here was a character.

Of all the drivers they had seen go by the relay they had never found one like this man, and his masked face and enigmatical words impressed them with a certain awe, for Foxey expressed the opinion of all when he said:

"See here, pard, I'm betting your way now, for you is jist ther man ter go through."

"That is my intention, and woe be to the one who bars my way," was the calm reply of the Masked Driver, spoken in his deep, sonorous voice.

The fresh team having been hitched in, refusing a glass of grog offered him, the Masked Driver drove on his way, Knuckles remarking:

"See here, pards, that coach was closed up tight, but I seen a man's eye looking out thet leetle glass, on ther rear seat."

"Yas, he intends a trap, he does," said Foxey, and all stood gazing after the coach and wondering who the Masked Driver could be.

On drove the Masked Driver along the trail, and entering the Death's Cañon he drew his horses down to a walk, placed his repeating rifle across his knees and loosened his revolvers in their holsters.

He passed the graves, the scene of the hold-ups, and no shot came, no one appeared to molest him.

Once through the cañon he passed on to the next relay station, blowing the stage horn as before, long ere he came in sight of the cabin, which showed a knowledge of where it was situated, at least. Murdock was the name of the station master at this relay.

When the coach drove up before Relay Number Two, Murdock and his men were there to greet the driver, and started when they beheld the large form and masked face of the one who had dared Death's Cañon.

The Masked Driver halted, saluted politely and waited for them to speak.

"Waal, pard, yer has got us foul," said Murdock.

"In what way?" came the answer, in the deep voice of the unknown driver.

"We don't know yer."

"No man does."

"Yer don't show yer face."

"If my face is masked I offer my body as a target, however, for any murderer who wishes to take the chances of killing me," said the Masked Driver.

"Yer is cut an' dried for 'em, then?"

"Let them fire at me and then remember what I have said, for, as I remarked before, I am no fool."

"Waal, pard, luck to yer, and it will be a great day when yer breaks up this murder business on ther trails. Will yer hev a leetle dinner?"

"No, thank you, for I carry my lunch with me."

"Won't a drop o' liquor do yer good?"

"No, thanks, I never drink," was the response.

The horses being hitched in, the Masked Driver sent them off with a crack of his whip, while Murdock and his men gave him a cheer.

It was an hour before sunset when the sentinel on the watch-tower at Fort Famine reported the stage coming in. Who was the driver that dared make the run was the question upon every lip.

On came the coach at a rapid pace, and all the fort had gathered to receive it.

As it drove into the stockade walls such a cheer as greeted the driver was never heard before in Fort Famine.

He had run the Death Gauntlet in safety.

The coach was closed, so there could not be any passengers.

The driver had come through alone. And the driver was masked.

The soldiers and others at Fort Famine regarded the unknown man curiously, and with something akin to awe.

"Who is he?"

That was the all-pervading question asked, with no one to give a satisfactory solution.

The officers seemed surprised that Major Dean, the commander, did not know, and the ladies in the fort had their curiosity excited to an almost alarming extent.

The Masked Driver had been invited to half a dozen messes, but declined all invitations, and admiring the pluck of the man in taking the reins after the fatalities he knew of to all drivers, the bachelor club of officers sent him in a splendid supper and a bottle of wine with their compliments to the little cabin belonging to Buffalo Bill, which he occupied.

It was early when the light went out in the driver's lone cabin, and yet others remained up until late discussing him.

Next day the Masked Driver drove back at an ordinary pace, as though not anxious to push his horses too hard, and arrived in sight of the Relay Corral Number Two on the usual time.

Murdock, Sykes and Giant George, the three stocktenders, were there when he drove up, and the two latter had the fresh horses all ready in place for the change.

"Well, pard, I guess they made much of you for going through O. K., didn't they?" asked Murdock.

"They seemed glad to see me go through without losing my life; but those who are posted understand that I will not be molested, or if I am, it will end right there and for good, outlawry on this trail."

"You don't say so!"

"Now, not wishing you any harm, I could almost want ther murderers ter make a break just, so as ter end it all."

"So do I," was the cool response. "In fact, I am willing to be sacrificed, just to have it happen that way."

Murdock and his men looked at the Masked Driver with increased admiration, mingled with awe. There was that about the man that impressed them greatly.

Again refusing lunch and a drink, the driver went on his way, and when drawing near the Death's Cañon brought his horses down, as before, to a walk.

He reached the open space, where the graves were, with his revolvers ready and his rifle across his knees, and cocked.

He even halted at the place of hold-up, and looked searchingly about him.

But not a sound was heard, not a leaf moved, and all was as quiet as those in the graves near by.

So on he went once more, yet still keeping on his guard, and drove up to Station Number One slightly ahead of time.

Foxy and his men gave a wild cheer when they saw him coming, and the former cried, triumphantly:

"Pard, yer has done it!

"Yer has run ther Fatal Trail, yer has faced ther Death Gauntlet and come out all right! You is a dandy from 'Wayback, pard."

"I have not yet reached the end of my trail, Foxy, for there are many miles to travel yet; but I'll be ready for whoever holds me up."

"Yer hain't got no passengers, has yer?"

"Not one."

"What makes yer keep ther old hearse closed up so tight?"

"Why leave it open when there is nobody aboard?"

"Maybe you has a treasure inside thet don't need air?"

"Maybe I have, pard, and I only wish some curious road agent would make a search for it."

"I guess they'd be surprised, eh?"

"They might, if they lived long enough to know what the surprise was."

Foxy stepped several paces further off from the coach, as though fearful that it had been turned into an infernal machine.

If the driver observed his action he made no comment, but started once more on the trail.

He sent his team along at an easy pace, and yet kept his eyes constantly on the alert for any danger.

He was not to be caught napping, and was ready or any emergency.

It was yet some time before sunset when the coach came over the ridge which brought the driver in sight of Fort Rest.

There was a plain, broken here and there by ridges and timber, to cross before reaching the fort, but the Masked Driver saw that the coach had been discovered at the fort and that its coming was creating a sensation.

As it drew near, the stockade walls were lined with soldiers, flags were run up on the staffs before the officers' cabins, and the guard was drawn up to receive the daring man who had been recognized as the Masked Driver.

The officer of the day had ascended to the watch tower, and leveling his glass had called out to the sergeant of the guard:

"Sergeant, report at once to Colonel Miles that the man on the box is the Masked Driver!"

A yell of delight broke forth at this news, and descending from the tower the officer of the day arranged a reception for the brave fellow.

The notes of the stage horn rung out merrily as the coach neared the gate, and soon after into the stockade dashed the six horses, held well in hand by the Masked Driver.

He saluted at the "Present arms" given him, and the cheers that followed, while, as he approached the stage station, the fort band struck up the air:

"See, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

It certainly was a grand reception for the unknown man, and he felt it, as he glanced over the sea of faces, of soldiers, scouts, women and children.

Dismounting from his box the Masked Driver found it hard to avoid the crowd about him, so said:

"I have to report, sir, that I made the run in safety, not having been molested in the slightest degree, so that the mails are intact.

Pete Porter, the stage boss, grasped the hand of the speaker and wrung it hard, while he responded:

"You have done that which no other man could do, and I have faith that you were not born to be shot on the box of an Overland stage."

"I trust not, sir."

"But now I must report to Colonel Miles, for whom I have dispatches."

Way was made for him through the crowd, and he walked with erect manner and dignified mien on to headquarters, bowing at the reception everywhere given him.

The colonel met him in a very cordial manner and said:

"Do you know that I have a suspicion that I know you, my mysterious Unknown?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I do."

"Who do you think I am, sir?"

"Why, no more nor less than William F. Cody, Buffalo Bill."

A light laugh came from beneath the thick, black mask, and then followed the rejoinder:

"You are wrong, sir."

"In love and war all things are fair, it is said, so perhaps you consider it so to deny my charge; but still I believe you to be Buffalo Bill, and for that very reason I have the more confidence in you."

"Buffalo Bill is well worthy of your confidence, sir; but I am not the one you think I am. I will report, sir, in time to take the coach out again, for Driver Brighton takes it on the run to Trail End City, and back to the fort."

"So I understand; but you will remain in the fort of course?"

"Your pass, sir, gives me the right to go and come at will, so I shall avail myself of it, having your kind permission."

"All right, the pass will protect you," answered the colonel, and as the Masked Driver left the room he mused to himself:

"Now is that man Buffalo Bill, or is he not?"

"I thought so, and I do not think so—in fact, I do not know."

"Well, I must bide my time to see this riddle solved."

Straight to the quarters of Buffalo Bill went the Masked Driver, in the gathering gloom, for night was coming on.

CHAPTER V.

BUFFALO BILL'S DOUBLE.

The fort had sunk into quiet, the band had ceased playing, and the bugle had sounded "taps," when a tall form glided among the trees toward the quarters of Colonel Miles, and a few moments after presented himself before the sentinel stationed there.

As chief of scouts the sentinel saluted Buffalo Bill, whom he recognized, and the orderly took in his name to Colonel Miles, who said, curtly:

"Admit him."

"Well, Cody, this time you come as yourself, I see?" said the colonel.

"Yes, colonel, as Buffalo Bill."

"See here, Cody, what does this masquerading of yours mean?"

"I do not understand, sir, to what you refer."

"I believe you to be the Masked Driver, that is what I mean."

"You are mistaken, Colonel Miles; but now that I understand that you mistake me for the Masked Driver of Death's Cañon, let me remind you that I told you that I would secure a man to drive the trail, and that I could not now explain any mystery attached to him?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I cannot explain the situation as it stands, for I am under pledge not to do so; but I confess that I asked for leave, to work out this mystery, and bring to punishment the guilty murderers of Death's Cañon."

"Go about matters in your own way, Cody, and if I suspect you it is only of being the Masked Driver."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"I came into the fort to-night, sir, to ask for an

officer, four soldiers and a scout, and to have them leave in a way that it will not be known that they go."

"All right, when do you want them?"

"The night before the coach goes out on its next run, sir."

"Very well."

"They can leave by your gate in the stockade, and I will be outside to guide them to a retreat. I have selected Buckskin Charlie as the scout, sir, and may I ask for Lieutenant Manning Moore as the officer, with four soldiers whom he may select?"

"Yes, and both Lieutenant Moore and Buckskin Charlie are the very men, I take it, you need—utterly fearless, intelligent, cautious and capable of enduring any hardships, and willingly in the discharge of duty."

"They are, sir, and I would like Lieutenant Moore to select just such men among the soldiers, for there will be danger and hardship for them to face."

"I will send for Lieutenant Moore in the morning and tell him what you wish."

"And that not a whisper must get out, sir, of his going."

"I will impress that upon him."

"And kindly send for Buckskin Charlie also, sir, for I do not wish to be seen in the fort, and must ask you to so state to your sentinel and orderly."

"You are going out then to-night?"

"Yes, sir, by your gate, which you gave me the key of. I came in that way to-night."

The colonel smiled, but said:

"Where is your double?"

"Who is that, sir?"

"Your shadow, or shadower, the Masked Driver?"

"He left the fort, sir, a short while ago, for he has his pass, you know, sir, and I met him outside."

"Well, Cody, I will instruct the orderly, and the sentinel to say nothing of your coming to my quarters to-night. Now tell me if there is anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, sir, I thank you, more than to detail Lieutenant Moore and Buckskin Charlie, with the four soldiers for the special work I need them for."

"I will attend to it in the morning early."

Then Buffalo Bill arose and took his leave of the colonel.

Leaving the colonel's quarters he glided among the trees to a clump of heavy timber in the rear of the stockade, which was used as a park by the officers and their families.

It was here that the colonel's gate in the stockade was located and, fitting the key in the lock, the scout removed the bars and went outside.

A man stood close against the stockade wall apparently awaiting him, and Buffalo Bill asked in a low tone:

"Have you the lariat, pard?"

"Yes, here it is."

The scout took the lariat, re-entered the gate, locked it, replaced the heavy bars in position that made it more secure, and then threw the end of the lasso around the limb of a tree near.

Taking the end he climbed up the stockade wall, which at that point was twenty feet in height, and then lowered himself to the ground on the outside.

Hauling on one end of the lariat he drew it over after him, remarking:

"Now, pard, we can go; but it would never have done to leave that gate unlocked."

"No, for though no danger might happen from doing so, still, if there did it would fall upon you, Bill."

"Sure," and the scout led the way over the plain surrounding the fort.

The sentinels at the corners of the stockade did not see them, and really there was no need of a guard near the gate, as the wall was built upon the side of a hill, and was all of twenty-five feet in height on the outside and of heavy timber, cut square and planted firmly in the ground.

The two pards moved rapidly over the plain, reached the ridge and descended into the valley beyond, which they continued along for several miles at a brisk walk.

At length they turned short off to the right, up a ravine, and this led them to a cañon, which they passed through to a range of mountains, which they ascended to the summit.

Here was a plateau, heavily timbered, with a soft carpet of grass, immense boulders here and there, and a tiny rivulet falling over a precipice.

In among the rocks was a camp, a small tent being there, a couple of saddles and bridles hanging upon trees near, a pack-saddle, and beyond, on a grassy plot, were three horses staked out, and feeding.

Before the tent lay two large, ferocious-looking dogs; but they were chained to a tree, and seemingly muzzled, so that they could not open their mouths to bark.

They greeted the visitors by wagging their tails and showing delight at their coming.

Buffalo Bill scraped some live coals of fire out of the ashes, threw upon them some wood, and soon had a blaze, the light of which was shut out by the rocks about the camp and the heavy timber.

The flaring up of the fire revealed the fact that the companion of Buffalo Bill was the Masked Driver of the Death's Cañon, for he still wore his black mask and his gauntlet gloves.

While the scout set to work to get supper the Masked Driver led the three horses to the little pool of water to drink.

Then he staked them out securely in a fresh grazing-ground, gathered some wood and returned to the camp.

The scout was not long in getting supper, and the

two sat down and appeared to enjoy the meal immensely, the dogs being unmuzzled and given their share, also.

After supper the two pards talked together for a while, and then went to their blankets in the little tent, leaving the dogs to watch the camp, though they did not appear to dread any harm befalling them.

The next morning they arose early, got breakfast, changed the grazing ground of their horses, and then, each one taking a dog with him, started off down the mountain side upon a separate trail.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY TOLD AT TRAIL END CITY.

When it was the hour for the starting of the stage the next morning, on its run to Trail End City, a large crowd had assembled to see it off, for it was supposed by many that the Masked Driver was to be on the box.

But Brighton appeared and reported ready for duty, while the Masked Driver was nowhere to be seen.

It was a great disappointment to all, and Driver Brighton saw, as he mounted his box and drove away, that all in the fort were hero-worshippers, and he regretted, now that the Masked Driver had gone through to Fort Famine and back in safety, that he had not made the run himself and gotten the glory of it.

He drove on over the trail, where he looked for no danger, unless from solitary road agent, who, wanting money, might hold him up, and at each of the relay stations between the fort and Trail End City had his story to tell of the Masked Driver, who had taken the coach twice through the Death's Cañon.

"Who is he, Pard Brighton?" was anxiously asked him by the stock-tenders on the relay station between Trail End City and Fort Rest, known as Station A.

But this question he could not answer, more than to say:

"Many believes it is Buffalo Bill, playing some game he don't want to be known in, and if it is, I guesses ther colonel knows."

Driving on more rapidly, after leaving the last relay corral, Brighton came in sight of Trail End City before nightfall.

This time the coach was coming in on the regular time, not being late, and when the people of Trail End City heard the stage horn they flocked to the Wayside, the only hotel in the place, to welcome it.

Pete Porter was there and heartily called out for a cheer for Brighton, which was given with a will, and then he was asked:

"Well, Pard Brighton, did the coach go through to Fort Famine this time?"

"It did, boss."

"Did you drive?"

"I did not," was the somewhat sullen response, for Brighton could not but see what a chance he had missed to become a great hero.

"Who did?"

"Buffalo Bill's man."

"Who were he?"

"I don't know."

"Was he killed?"

"Naw."

"Not shot at?"

"No, nothin'."

"What then happened?"

"Nothin'."

There were those in the crowd who were disappointed.

They were looking for another sensation.

They wanted to hear of another tragedy upon the Fatal Trail, another murder at the Death's Cañon, so long as it did not affect them.

"Yer say yer don't know the driver?"

"Boss, I wants ter explain why I don't know nothin' about ther gent as drove ther huss through ter Fort Famine and back to Fort Rest, whar I took it."

"I wish that you would."

"Yer see he were masked."

"Masked?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill's driver."

A murmur of amazement ran over the dense crowd, and then, having excited his listeners to the utmost, Driver Brighton told the story of the Masked Driver, unknown apparently to all except Buffalo Bill, who had taken the coach to Fort Famine and back without molestation.

Though not the man who had taken the coach through to Fort Famine, Driver Brighton had his vanity gratified by still being looked upon as a hero in Trail End City.

He had brought the news of the Masked Driver going through, and as he was the driver of the same coach as far as Fort Rest and back, and that was a great deal, he found out, for he was invited to drink by every one who wished to hear his story, until he found himself not only unable to talk, but to navigate as well, and the overcome hero was taken to bed by admiring friends, who, in drinking his health, had become very nearly in a like condition.

With a head that felt as big as a barrel the next morning, Driver Brighton swore off, for he was convinced that it was not the part of a hero to get drunk like any ordinary mortal.

He was told, too, by the stage boss that there was valuable express matter to go to Fort Rest, and there

might be some passengers, and hence he must brace up, or another man would be sent in his place.

This sobered Brighton at once, for he could not share the honors of being a hero with any one else, and, besides, he dearly loved that run to Fort Rest, or rather his stay there after his arrival, the boys treated him so well.

So Brighton went into a life of seclusion for a couple of days, and emerged thoroughly himself again the day before he was to start upon his return run to Fort Rest.

The coaches came in from east, south and north, and though they brought no passengers, the one from the eastward had more express matter for Fort Rest, and more as well for Fort Famine.

When he came out in the morning for his start, after a hearty breakfast, the driver found the express matter all safely stored in the cuddy under the box seat, the horses ready, and nothing to do but mount and await the command of Pete Porter to go.

The whole settlement was there, too, to bid him godspeed, and many a one called out to him to get all the points down fine about the Masked Driver, so as to tell them on his return in four days.

"Find out who he is, Pard Brighton, and I'll jist put up ther money ter git yer loaded myself," cried one.

"Me, too," yelled another, and so it went on until Brighton felt that he would have to join the Rocky Mountain Total Abstinence Society did he expect to keep from dying a drunkard.

"All ready, Brighton?" called out Pete Porter.

"All ready, sir."

"Go!"

Away went the horses as the whip cracked, and the stable boys sprung back from the heads of the leaders.

A shout followed from the crowd, and all eyes watched the coach go down the hill, cross the stream, and wind up the mountain trail until it disappeared in the distance.

Here and there as he passed a lonely cabin, within a mile or more of the Wayside, Brighton was waved a good-by from the dweller therein, who had not been down to see him start.

"Luck to you, old man," cried one, while further on another called out:

"Don't lose your life in Death's Cañon, pard, for there have too many good men gone that way already."

"Never fear for me, pard," was the hopeful response of the driver, and, without a shadow upon his brow, and only sunshine in his heart, he went on climbing up the mountain side.

The first relay, Relay A, was come to, and the usual halt made for a change of horses, and then the journey was continued.

The next relay, known as Relay B, was come to,

for it was a mountainous road to Fort Rest, and there were two stock corrals between there and Trail End City, and once more the horses were changed.

"Any news, pards?" asked the driver as he drove up to the last relay.

"Hain't heerd none, hain't seen nobody," was the answer.

"What's the news down Trail End way?" asked one of the stock tenders.

"Nothin', only ther boys got me away off when I went in and told them about ther Masked Driver."

"Did they believe it?"

"Does yer know any man would enjoy callin' me a liar, pard?" was the very significant rejoinder.

The stock tender did not appear to have any acquaintance who dared to call Brighton a liar, and so argument there was none, and the coach went on once more.

Five miles from the corral, and when within ten of Fort Rest, Driver Brighton halted in crossing a stream to water his horses, then suddenly there appeared in the trail ahead of him a man, who called out:

"Don't shoot, pard, fer I hain't no road agent, only a miner as wants a lift to Fort Famine."

Driver Brighton was a man of good heart, and he could not refuse the wretched-looking vagabond who accosted him a ride on the coach.

He had dropped his hand upon his revolver at sight of him, believing he was to be held up, but the words, quickly uttered by the man, disarmed his suspicion, and he said:

"Ef yer is in hard luck, pard, and can't pay yer tax, I'll treat yer to ther ride as fer as I go."

"Yer is mighty good, fer I is in hard luck, and so awful poor I hain't got nothin', fer my last gun went fer grub and I is thet hungry I c'u'd chaw grass."

The man was a hard-looking specimen of humanity certainly.

His hair and beard were unkempt, his boots much the worse for wear, and his general make-up was that of a man in really hard luck.

"It's all drink, yer see, and gamblin'."

"I got drunk back in ther camps and ther boys cleaned me out, so I jist started fer ther new mines I has heerd of up near Fort Famine, fer I kin git a stake thar, I guesses, and ef not I kin join ther army."

The driver smiled at the thought of such a vagabond entering the army, but he said:

"Well, I have a part of my lunch here you can have, and I'll give you a seat on the box with me ter Fort Rest, and there the soldiers and scouts will give you a helping hand, for the boys in blue never go back on one in distress."

"Yer is mighty kind, pard, and I 'preciates it, deed I does—my! but this lunch do taste powerful good and no mistake."

Brighton seemed really to enjoy seeing the man eat, and to have given him a lift along the trail, and chatted pleasantly with him, with no thought of treachery until suddenly the stranger drew his hand from his bosom, there was a flash and report, and, with a moan, the driver would have fallen from his box had not the murderer caught him and thrown him back on the top of the coach.

Then he grasped the reins and drew the startled horses to a walk, when he glanced back along the trail.

Almost immediately there came into view two men upon foot and walking rapidly.

As they drew near the coach one of them called out:

"You got him, Dave?"

"You bet I did," was the answer of the man on the box.

"Dead?"

"I shoots ter kill, and it were a very neat job."

"Where's the plunder?"

"In ther cuddy under the seat here."

"I'll hand it to yer."

He took out the express packages, three in number, and handed them down to the other two men, who were a most villainous looking pair of ruffians.

"What'll yer do with ther deader?" asked one.

"Leave him whar he is, soon as I has fingered his pockets."

"And ther team?"

"Start it on ther trail for ther fort."

"Better not, for ther critters might git thar too quick."

"What'll I do then?"

"Why, jist tie 'em and let them at ther fort come out and look 'em up, when ther coach don't git it on time."

"All right."

"I'll be with yer soon as I makes ther critters fast."

He drove the animals out of the trail to where there were some trees that they could be hitched to, and, making them fast, he went on after his comrades, who had swung the express packages upon a stick to be carried on their shoulders.

Then the three started off, the pretended vagabond taking off the boots he had worn and putting on moccasins in their stead, and which would leave no track, his two comrades wearing the same.

They started on then at a brisk step, going over hill and down valley, seemingly with untiring step, for mile after mile was left behind them.

At length the sun went down, twilight followed, then night came on, but still the three men trudged along untiringly, one relieving the other two from time to time in carrying the pole upon which the express packages were hanging.

But the darkness did not retard their way, for they

knew the trail well, from the steady manner in which they held on, and still without showing fatigue.

At length they turned into a broad and shallow stream, flowing through a cañon with lofty banks of rocks upon either side.

Into the stream they went, turning against the current, and, after wading for half a mile, they stepped out upon some rocks and began the ascent of the steep hill, or almost cliff.

A climb of sixty feet brought them to a plateau, where, under a mountain spur, they came upon a rudely-made cabin, built against the solid rock.

"Well, pards, here we is, and I hope when the capt'in sees what we has captered ter-morrow, he'll find it a rich prize.

"Now for supper and then ter sleep, for I'm tired out."

"Yas, killin' thet driver made you tired I guesses.

"Yer don't exercise enough in thet line o' work ter git yer hand in," growled one of his companions.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUND.

It was the afternoon of the day when Brighton was expected in with the coach from Trail End City, that the sentinel beheld a man on foot approaching Fort Rest.

He reported the fact, and, as the pedestrian drew nearer, made it known that he recognized in him the Masked Driver.

It was the Masked Driver, looking fresh, and stepping with elastic tread as though he felt no fatigue, and had not tramped far.

He acknowledged the military salute the sentinel gave him, and handed to the corporal his pass from the colonel, which at once admitted him to the fort.

His steps led him toward the cabin of Buffalo Bill, and on the way thither he met a number who greeted him with marked respect.

Halting at the office of the stage boss, he reported that he would be ready to take the coach out on time the following morning, and was passing on when Gill, the boss at this station, said:

"I say, pard, the coach is now half an hour late."

"Do you think anything could have happened to it on the trail between here and Trail End City, sir?"

"No telling."

"If you wish, I shall be glad to mount a horse, sir, and go out to look the coach up."

"Well, if Brighton does not come in within the next half hour I will get you to do so, for there were some valuable packages to come through on this run."

"I will be ready at any time, sir.

"You will find me at Buffalo Bill's cabin should you want me," and the Masked Driver passed on.

The stage-master waited impatiently for a while, and yet no report came from the sentinel on the watch tower of the coach being in sight.

The soldiers and others were gathering at the station to see the coach come in, and at last word came from Colonel Miles asking if Brighton had arrived.

Then Gill went to Buffalo Bill's cabin after the Masked Driver.

He was most curious to know who that driver was, and felt provoked that he at least was not let into the secret by Buffalo Bill, no matter who else were kept from it.

He therefore wanted to catch the man unprepared, and so acted slyly.

He walked lightly to the door, put his hand on the latch and suddenly opened the door.

There sat the driver by the window, studying a map, but he was masked.

Gill was mad clean through because he was foiled, yet dared not show it.

So he said as pleasantly as he could:

"I have come, sir, to ask you to go and look Brighton up, for he is an hour and a half behind, and this looks bad on the trail between here and Trail End City."

"Certainly, sir; I will take one of Buffalo Bill's horses and be off in five minutes."

As though well acquainted with his surroundings, the Masked Driver took an extra saddle and bridle the scout had there in the cabin, and, going to the scouts' corral, selected one of the best horses of the lot.

In a minute he was lassoed, saddled, bridled and mounted, when the Masked Driver went dashing out of the fort at a sweeping gallop.

The crowd cheered him, and he acknowledged the compliment by a bow.

Out of the gate he went and was soon lost to sight in the distance.

All waited with what patience they could the result of his going.

That some accident had befallen the coach they felt certain, but was it the death of the driver?

Were the same red scenes to be enacted upon the trail between the fort and Trail End City that had been between Fort Rest and Fort Famine.

The sun went down in a blaze of glory, twilight cast its golden haze over the land, and at last darkness crept on so gently that it was hardly noticed until no longer could objects be seen in the distance.

One, two hours passed away since the departure of the Masked Driver.

The coach was now nearly four hours behind, and surely something had gone wrong.

Three hours had the Masked Driver been gone when the sentinel on the watch-tower heard the distant rumble of wheels.

Later he reported the coach coming along the trail.

at a rapid pace, and soon into the stockade dashed the lumbering vehicle, with the Masked Driver on the box and Brighton nowhere visible.

But for the fact that "taps" had sent the soldiers to their barracks, and put the fort under the night guard, all the people within those stockade walls would have been on hand to receive the coach when it came in.

"Where is Brighton?" cried the stage-master as soon as the Masked Driver came to a halt at the station.

"Dead, in the coach, sir," was the reply.

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you find the coach?"

"Back on the trail about ten miles, the horses hitched to a tree, and Brighton lying in the road dead, where he had fallen from the box."

"What! was he ill, or——"

"He was shot."

"Ha! by whom?"

"The mysterious murderers, of course, for who else could it be, sir, as the coach had been robbed."

"Curses! this is getting to be appalling."

"It has been so for some time, I take it," was the quiet remark of the Masked Driver.

"No one was there?"

"I saw no one, sir, for it was dark when I reached the coach, and being off the trail where the team was hitched, I would not have seen it but for discovering the body of poor Brighton lying in the road, and then hearing one of the horses neigh."

"And then?"

"I found that the body of the driver had been rifled of all valuables, so I placed it in the coach, and then discovered that the packages had also been taken."

"Well, you had better make your report to Colonel Miles, and I suppose this will end the coach runs beyond Trail End City," disconsolately said Gill.

"Why so, sir?"

"Who will dare now take a coach between here and Trail End City?"

"I will, sir."

"You?"

"Yes, I'll drive the whole run, as was formerly done by the drivers."

"I am glad to hear you say so, but I fear you will not last long."

"I can at least try it," was the reply.

"You are game clean through and no mistake; but you had better go and report what has happened to the colonel."

The Masked Driver went at once to the quarters of Colonel Miles, and was admitted.

"Well, sir, I have just heard that you returned with Brighton's coach?"

"Yes, colonel, and brought poor Brighton's body back in it."

"Ha! I had not learned more than that you had brought it in."

"Tell me of your discovery."

The Masked Driver did so and the colonel listened with deepest attention, and then said:

"Then there is but one thing to do and that is, as the redskins are quiet now, to allow each coach to go under guard."

"No, colonel, there is no need of a guard, for I will take the whole drive, sir, from Trail End City to Fort Famine and back."

The colonel looked at the masked man before him with surprise, and asked:

"Do you suppose that will check the deeds of these murderers, your driving?"

"I passed through in safety on the last run, sir."

"And may be murdered on this."

"I'll risk it, sir."

"Well, go ahead, but I am greatly tempted to guard the whole line."

"Do not do so, Colonel Miles; do not send any men from camp unless necessary, for I intended to inform you, sir, that the Indians are not as quiet as you believe, and Buffalo Bill wished me to say to you to throw out nearly all of the scouts toward the redskin country, with orders to report every suspicious move, and have the men in buckskin at Fort Famine also go out."

"You surprise me, for, after the thrashing we lately gave the Sioux, they certainly cannot be upon the eve of another fight against us."

"Let me explain to you, colonel, that the Cheyennes to the north have come southward and allied themselves with their old enemies against the whites."

"They came with food, tepees and ponies in plenty, and readily aided the Sioux in their distress and need after your battle with them, and, thus emboldened by the alliance, the combined forces are in a very ugly and threatening mood, so it will be well, Cody says, to run a double line of scouts across the country from here to Fort Famine, and have others to scout as near the Indian country as possible, to watch every move of the redskins."

"This is startling news, surely," said Colonel Miles, with considerable surprise.

"It is startling news, Colonel Miles, but it is the truth, as Cody will vouch for when he comes to see you," said the Masked Driver.

"When will he come?"

"Day after to-morrow night, sir."

"Well, I am glad of the warning, and I will prepare accordingly. But where is Cody now?"

"He is scouting, sir."

"Toward the Indian country?"

"No, sir, on the Fatal Trail."

"But now to sending out these scouts."

"Here is a map, hastily drawn, sir, showing the

position of the Sioux camps, which they have changed from their old ones, and the place where the Cheyenne village is, with the distances apart marked, and also the number of miles between them and the forts. These red dots, sir, are in double lines, you see, Colonel Miles, and they mark the positions where the scouts are to take their posts, while the red lines are the trails the scouts who move about are to traverse. This will be a strong barrier between you and the redskins, and, by the scouts keeping out of sight of the Indians, they will expect, should they make a raid, to surprise you, or Fort Famine, for they will attack one of the forts first in full force, and then sweep down upon the other."

"Who drew this map, sir?"

"I did, sir."

"It is just what I have wanted, and I thank you for it."

"I see that you have the Fatal Trail marked upon it."

"Yes, sir, it gives the country westward of the Fatal Trail line."

"I am glad to get it, for it appears to me to be exact, but now to these scouts?"

"I would send them out to-night, sir, showing them this map, and letting each man take position as he has been assigned."

The orderly was at once dispatched to the scouts' quarters, to order thirty of their number to report to Colonel Miles within the hour, ready to start upon a long expedition, with ten days' provisions, and well mounted and armed.

The Masked Driver turned to go, when the colonel said:

"If you do not mind, sir, I would like to have you remain and give the scouts, when they come, certain directions about this country, for you must be most familiar with it to have drawn this map."

"I know every foot of it, sir."

"Then help me direct the scouts to their posts of duty, please."

"With pleasure, sir," and when the scouts began to drop in, surprised at a call for so many men by night, for scouting duty, that required ten days' provisions, the Masked Driver gave them full instructions as to what their positions and duties were, each one showing marked respect for a man they did not know, but whom they knew as their chief's pard, and who had proven his claim to respect and admiration from them.

Having sent the scouts out, Colonel Miles, ever on the alert to guard against attack, had at once held a consultation with his officers, told them of the news he had received, and ordered that the whole command be kept as though in a state of siege, though nothing should be said to alarm the people.

The next morning four-fifths of the garrison were

on hand to see the coach start on its drive to Fort Famine.

Out of Buffalo Bill's cabin, five minutes before starting time, came the Masked Driver, and he bowed courteously to the salutations that greeted him.

He reported to Stage-Master Gill, and then mounting his box, gathered up his reins and awaited the word.

The coach was empty, the windows open, and only the mail was aboard, for, for some reason, the robbers never molested Uncle Sam's letters, though delaying their delivery often by their deeds of lawlessness.

"Go!"

With the word the whip cracked, the horses bounded forward, and the coach went on its way with a rush.

The coach disappeared over the ridge, and the Masked Driver slackened his pace.

When he halted at the first brook to water his horses, he dismounted from his box and entered the coach.

He was inside for quite a while, and when he emerged he had changed his attire.

Then he shut the coach up close, and, resuming his box and reins, moved on as before.

"Well, yer is back ag'in, pard?" said Murdock, as he drove up to Relay Number One.

"Oh, yes, why not?"

"I thought maybe Brighton being killed might frighten you off."

The Masked Driver did not immediately reply.

"Oh, no, it would take more than one man's death to frighten me off the trail I am on, and, in fact, I intend to drive Brighton's run now."

"Somehow I believe you has got a trap set fer 'em, and has 'em foul."

"Wait and see," was the laconic and significant response, and again declining food and drink, the Masked Driver left the relay station, after being told that Foxey was at Number Two that day.

Arriving at Number Two, the men said that Foxey was off on his rounds of the station corrals, and, after a short halt, the Masked Driver went on.

He had passed once more the gauntlet of Death's Cañon, and without seeing a soul or meeting with any adventure.

He arrived in sight of Fort Famine just on time, and, as before, found an excited throng to receive him, anxious to know what had happened to him on the run out.

He at once sought Major Dean and gave to him the dispatches sent by Colonel Miles, while, at the latter's request, he made known to him what he had said about the alliance of the Sioux and the Cheyennes, and a premeditated raid by their combined forces upon the forts.

The Masked Driver then explained the situation fully to Major Dean, while the scouts were preparing to take the trails, and when they came, thirty in number, he directed each man to his position, they treating him with the same deep respect as the men in buckskin at Fort Rest had done.

In fact, the scouts looked upon the Masked Driver with a certain awe which they could not fathom.

The next morning all the fort was on hand to see the coach start off.

The driver came out of Buffalo Bill's cabin as before, had a few words with the stage-master, took the package handed to him by Major Dean's orderly, and addressed to Colonel Miles, and, with a salute to those who cheered him, mounted his box, gathered up his reins, and, at the word, was off.

Soon the coach rolled out of sight, and then the excitement settled down into almost gloom, for the suspense as to what might occur was greater to bear than the actual reality.

Back to Station Two drove the Masked Driver, having halted upon the way as before and closed up his coach, and, after a short talk with the men, and a change of horses, went on his way toward the Death's Cañon, having been told by Murdock, who had again returned to his post, that "Captain" Fox was still out upon the trails, visiting the relay corrals.

When he approached Death's Cañon, as upon former occasions, the Masked Driver drew his team down to a walk, cocked his repeating rifle and laid it across his knees, put one revolver on the seat by his side and had the other in his belt, ready to draw when the necessity to do so should arrive.

The horses went along with ears pricked, as though they scented danger, and this put the Masked Driver thoroughly upon his guard.

As he entered the open space so frequently referred to before, the keen eyes glaring through the mask saw a horseman approaching.

He was just entering the space, which Buffalo Bill had named the burying ground, from the other end.

"It is Foxey," said the Masked Rider to himself, and he drew his horses to a halt.

Foxey came on at a canter now, and called out:

"Sorry I didn't see yer when yer passed Number Three, pard o' ther mask, but I was out on my rounds inspectin' ther corrals, for yer may not know I is capt'in of the relay layout atween Trail End City and Famine?"

"Oh, yes, I knew that?"

"Well, is all well in the corrals?"

"Yes. How is it with you?"

"Couldn't ask to have it better."

"Yer hain't been attacked once, has yer?"

"Fortunately for those thieving murderers, no."

"And for yourself?"

"Oh, I don't mind, for I would give my life any time to know that they were hanged."

"Well, now, why can't yer let me in on this deal?"

"How so?"

"There's big money offered for them men, as you knows."

"Yes, a very handsome sum by the stage company."

"You surely want some help, and don't want all ther dust, does yer?"

"I want all I can get, Pard Foxey."

"Now, I hain't greedy, and if yer will let me in on yer leetle racket I'll take one-quarter share and work hard fer you."

"Well, I have thought of that, and when I get my plans all made as I wish them, I'll give you a call, Foxey."

"Thankee."

"Now, how is it thet you kin run this trail and not git kilt, as t'others has been?"

"Because I am sure, Foxey, only do not speak of it to any one outside of the stage company's people, that the murderers have learned in some way that I have a trap for them, which, when they make a break, will wipe the last one of them off the face of the earth. But not a hint of this, or it may spoil all," and the Masked Driver spoke in a whisper.

"No, indeed, you kin trust me."

"But what is your leetle game?"

"I'll tell you when I make known my plans to bag the murderers alive."

"Now, I must be going, so good-by, Foxey," and the Masked Driver started ahead, leaving the relay boss seated upon his horse and gazing after him with a strange expression on his face.

When the coach came into Fort Rest it was not closed, as it had been when passing the relay station and through Death's Cañon.

The blinds were down and the curtains were up on each side, as when it had started upon its way from each fort.

The colonel asked the Masked Driver many questions, and then said:

"I had word from the scouts' line an hour ago, and the report is that the redskins are certainly preparing for some move, and it can only be against us, so I did the right thing in following Cody's advice and yours, in sending the men in buckskin out to the front, to be between us and a raid."

"Yes, sir, for you cannot be surprised now."

"Well, my masked friend, you will take the coach to Trail End City in the morning, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I will make the attempt."

"Do you not wish an escort?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, you know best, and good fortune attend you is my heartiest prayer," and the colonel shook hands with the Masked Driver, who went at once to the cabin of Buffalo Bill.

But he had not been there long before he came

out, looked cautiously about him, sought the shadow of a row of trees and made his way to the officers' park, the timber before spoken of, and where, in the stockade wall, was the colonel's gate.

He reached the gate, removed the bars, unlocked it, and in stepped a tall form.

"Thanks, pard, I'll go at once to headquarters, for I suppose the colonel is there?"

"Yes, Bill, for I saw him there a couple of hours ago."

"Then had you not best await for me here, to bar the gate after I go out, for I will not be gone long?"

"Yes, I will wait here for you."

The other then moved rapidly on to the quarters of the colonel, passed the sentinel, and sent his name in by the orderly, when he was at once admitted.

"Well, Cody, I am glad to see you, but I assure you that between the Masked Driver and yourself I am getting sadly mixed."

"You still are in doubt, colonel, as to whether I am masquerading as the Masked Driver or not?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"I must confess that I am not clear in my mind about it, and yet I do not wish to doubt either his word or your own, if there be two of you instead of one," and the colonel looked quizzically at Cody, who rejoined:

"There are two of us, colonel, just now, myself and my second self, or my shadower, for we are working on each other's trails for a good purpose."

"I can believe that; but where is Lieutenant Manning Moore and his men, with Buckskin Charlie, who went with them?"

"They are on duty, sir, and I have come to ask of you seven more of my scouts, and I wish them to-night."

"You are aware that I sent thirty to the Indian country, as you suggested?"

"Yes, sir, and they will save you a surprise; but you can spare me seven of my men in buckskin, can you not, sir?"

"Of course, if you wish it."

"Colonel Miles, it is not my wish to keep you in the dark as to my movements, and what is being done, and if all comes out as we have planned, you will then understand why I did so; but I can secretly work to far better advantage, for I am my own master, and you will, I hope, soon see the results."

"All right, Cody, go ahead on the trail you have started upon in your own way."

"You shall have the scouts, so have you any choice of men?"

"Yes, sir, I would like these seven men sent for," and Buffalo Bill handed the colonel a list of seven names.

The scouts came to headquarters, seven in number, and they seemed surprised at seeing Buffalo Bill there.

He greeted them pleasantly, and said:

"I wish you to go at once, pards, and prepare for a ten days' trip. When ready, ride out of the fort and halt at the cottonweed tree on the plains, which is known as the sentinel. Lose no time in getting there, and I will meet you. Under no circumstances speak of my being in the fort. You understand?"

They answered in the affirmative, and left for their quarters.

After some further conversation with the colonel, Buffalo Bill took his leave, having made the same request as before, that the sentinel and the orderly should be instructed not to speak of his coming to the fort.

He made his way quickly to the little gate in the stockade wall, and there was met by his unknown companion, with whom he talked earnestly for some minutes.

Then they parted, Buffalo Bill going through the gate and the Masked Driver closing it after him.

While the latter returned to the cabin where he made his quarters, the scout hastily glided away to a distant clump of trees, where a horse was staked out awaiting him.

Mounting, he rode on to the place of rendezvous appointed with the scouts.

He arrived at the lone cottonwood trees and had not long to wait, the scouts soon coming in sight, riding in Indian file.

"Well, pards, you are here on time and I am glad of it, for you have some distance to travel before morning breaks."

"We are all ready for any racket, Pard Bill," said the leader of the party, Arizona Bob, a man with a record.

"I wish you to go to what you know, Arizona Bob, as Bee Hive Cliffs, and you will find Buckskin Charlie there awaiting you and one other, who will lead you to the party you are to act as guide and scout for, and which Lieutenant Manning Moore commands."

"He is a good one, none better," was Arizona Bob's quiet tribute to the young officer.

"Yes, he is just the man for the work on hand."

"You will go to his command, and the rest of you, boys, will go under the leadership of Buckskin Charlie, who will take you to the secret camp he knows of."

"With you, Arizona Bob, Lieutenant Moore will have six in his party, for he has four Indians with him, and Buckskin Charlie will have seven, including myself, and this is just the force I need to carry out my plans with."

"We'll do it, chief, never fear."

"Name the game and we'll follow you to death to bring it down," was Arizona Bob's response.

"I know that, boys."

"Now, good-night, for I have business elsewhere, but will see you in a day or two."

With this the scout rode one way, the men under Arizona Bob bending their steps toward the Bee Hive Cliffs, a dozen miles distant.

The way taken by Buffalo Bill was to the eastward, and he rode at a gallop for mile after mile.

At last he halted in a little valley, unsaddled his horse and staked him out, and on foot made his way to a rocky hill overhanging a swiftly-flowing stream, a mile away from where he had made his temporary camp.

He went up among the rocks, searched about until he found a place to suit him, and then spreading his blankets, laid down to rest, falling asleep almost immediately.

Back at the fort, after parting with Buffalo Bill, the Masked Driver had returned to the cabin where he made his quarters, and at once retired for the night.

He was up in good time, had his breakfast, which the cook of the officers' mess brought to him, and then started for the station to go out on the coach.

The interest in the going and coming of the coach, and in the mysterious unknown who so lightly risked his life, had increased instead of diminished, and the result was that a large crowd had again gathered to see the departure of the stage.

The Masked Driver was received, as before, with loud applause, and a cheer followed him as he drove away, a "present arms" greeting him at the gate when he dashed through.

This time there was hardly a person in the fort who expected to see him again, and it was the universal belief that the mysterious murderers, having shifted their scene of action from Death's Cañon, were lying in wait to kill the Masked Driver on his run to Trail End City, and a feeling of feverish suspense followed his going, with many questions asked as to why Colonel Miles did not send an escort with the plucky man, and thus save his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOXLEY IN TROUBLE.

When the Masked Driver left the relay station, where he had seen Foxley, the "captain" of the stock tenders, the latter stood gazing after him until the coach rolled out of sight.

Then they began to discuss his pluck and skill as a driver, until at last Foxley remarked:

"But I must be off, for I has ter git back on time, as ther boys will be anxious."

And so Captain Foxley mounted his horse and rode slowly away up the trail.

He had gotten to the spot where Brighton had been killed, and was gazing with considerable interest at the scene, little dreaming of danger to himself, when he heard the startling words:

"Both hands up, pard, or I pulls trigger!"

Foxley turned deadly pale, for he saw that he was fairly caught.

There, just to one side of him, was a boulder, and leaning over it, his rifle resting upon the top, his eye running along the barrel, was a man.

Who that man was he could not tell, for the face was concealed by a red handkerchief tied around the head, and holes neatly cut in it for the eyes.

The man was shabbily dressed, and his hair was long and matted, hanging on each side of his face like an old maid's curls.

But the rifle covered the heart of Foxley, and, loving life, he obeyed the command with alacrity.

Then the man came from behind the rock.

He had a blanket over him, the head thrust through a hole in the center, and he looked like one in hard luck.

"I wants yer guns first, pard, and yer knife."

With this he proceeded to take the belt of arms.

"Now I wants yer valuables."

"I hain't got none."

"Yer is dodgin' ther truth, fer here be a fine watch and chain, and I'll take thet ring, fer it may do ter give my gal, some day when I quits ther road-agent biz and turns honest. Come, I wants no nonsense, or yer goes ter grass with a bullet in yer."

Foxley groaned, but the robber was merciless, and he took the watch, chain and ring, and next struck him for his money.

Foxley was rather well supplied with money, but had to hand it over, though he swore by note at the robber for taking all he had.

The road agent, however, appeared to really enjoy his fury, and made a business of getting all that he had, for he searched his pockets, made him pull his boots off, and found a leather case of money in one of them and a few papers in the other.

"Now, pard, I guess I has about got all yer has o' value, so I'll say day-day to yer, and yer kin go yer way in sorrow, while I go mine rejoicin'. Yer were goin' up thet trail, so keep on, and if yer tarns back this way, yer is sart'in ter get a bullet. Git!"

Foxley needed no second bidding, but started off at a canter, swearing furiously, for never before in his life had he experienced the sensation of being held up and robbed.

He would have been glad to have gone back to the relay and gotten his men to go upon the trail of the road agent, but, after the threat made if he turned back, he dared not do so.

Then he thought of going across the country to his station, which he could do, and not follow the stage trail around by Fort Rest; but he was unarmed, and he decided to go by the fort and report to Colonel Miles his having been held up and robbed in the very spot where Brighton had been killed.

Having come to this determination, he continued

on at a rapid gallop for Fort Rest, still swearing at his ill-fortune in having been robbed, and muttering again and again to himself:

"I is a fool from 'Wayback, I is."

CHAPTER IX.

PETE PORTER'S EXPLANATION.

When the Masked Driver walked away from the stage station at Trail End City, where he had arrived in safety, he strolled about the settlement until it was dark, and then, descending the hill, crossed the stream upon the log bridge that spanned it, and went on up to the stage trail into the mountains.

He held on for several miles, until he came to a ridge, and here he turned off, following it to the left.

There was no trail along the ridge, but he seemed to know where he was going, for he did not halt until suddenly he heard a low whistle.

He stopped short and answered it by three sharp whistles.

Then a man stepped out from the shadow of a tree ahead, and said:

"Glad to see you, pard, for I was getting a trifle anxious."

"I am all right," was the answer.

"Here are the horses, so we'll mount and get away from here as quickly as possible, for we must visit both camps, you know, and we can travel only by night."

"Yes, and I must be back on the morning of the third day from this to take the coach out on the run."

"You'll get there on time, pard, never fear," was the answer.

And on the morning of the third day after his departure, and on time, the Masked Driver, as has been seen, marched up to the Wayside Hotel, and reported himself ready to Porter to take out the coach.

"Lordy, pard, where in thunder have you been?" cried Porter, in amazement.

"I get so little time to hunt that I took my rifle and went for a tramp through the mountains."

"And got lost, that's just about the size of it," cried Pete, laughing.

"Well, sir, let it go at that."

"I see that you don't want to own up, but that's it, I guess."

"But come in and have some breakfast, for it's an hour to starting time."

Out of Trail End City went the Masked Driver, halting when he got well up into the mountains, and again entering his coach, as upon former occasions.

When he got out, some fifteen minutes after, the coach was, as before, closed up completely.

The relays were passed with a halt only long enough to change the horses, and on to the fort went the coach, arriving a little ahead of time.

To see the Masked Driver come in on the box safe and sound, after Brighton's death, to have gone to Trail End City and back without being killed, drove the soldiers wild with enthusiasm, and they cheered him to the echo.

He gave the mail to the postmaster, and went up to headquarters with a special dispatch handed to him by the stage driver from the east.

He was greeted cordially and asked about his run to Trail End City and back, and told his story.

"You know, of course, the boss of the stock tenders at the relay corrals?" said the colonel.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, he was held up on his way from Number Two, and robbed of all he had."

"He came here to report it to me, and pleaded pitifully for me to let him take a hundred troopers and hunt down the robber."

"Yes, sir, he was held up at the very spot where Brighton was killed."

"Ah! you know of the affair, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have seen the man Fox since he was robbed?"

"No, sir."

"But his men told you?"

"No, sir."

"May I ask, then, how you learned of the robbery of Fox?"

"I am not at liberty to tell just now, sir; but you will soon know."

"You surprise me, sir."

"I am sorry not to be able to make known the facts, Colonel Miles, but I will do so before very long, and it will be a satisfactory explanation to you, I am sure."

"Now, sir, have you any dispatches for Fort Famine?"

"I will send a letter to Major Dean, and have it ready for you in the morning," and with this the Masked Driver returned to his cabin, leaving the colonel more and more impressed with the unknown man, whom he yet had a faint suspicion was Buffalo Bill.

As had become the custom now, the fatal coach, with the Masked Driver on the box, went out of Fort Rest in a whirl of glory, followed by cheer after cheer, for it had begun to appear as though the unknown had broken up the killing epidemic inaugurated by the mysterious murderers of Death's Cañon.

At the stream the driver halted to go through the same tactics of entering the coach, and then closing it, and when he came to the Death's Cañon it was the same draw down to a slow walk, the rifle across his knees, the revolver on the seat by his side.

Then a short halt was made in the open space, and on the coach went once more toward Fort Famine.

Foxy was at Relay Number Four when he drove

up, and he had a piteous story to tell of his being held up.

"The colonel told me about it, Foxey," said the Masked Driver, and yet he listened attentively to the story of the stock tender.

"It shows that thar be road agents still around, don't it, Masked Pard?"

"It does, and I only hope they'll hold up my coach some day, for this driving without danger is getting monotonous."

"Yer don't mean thet yer wants ter be held up?" asked Foxey, in amazement.

"I do."

"Yer'll sing a different tune when yer gits thar."

"I'll sing a tune in which they can join me in the chorus," was the complacent reply.

Then the Masked Driver asked.

"What did they get from you, Fox?"

"My watch and chain I prized highly, a ring a pard give me, some papers thet were of value ter me, but nobody else, and some few hundreds in money."

"Quite a haul, indeed; but I must be off," and the driver went on his way, and arrived safely at Fort Famine.

At the time of starting the next morning, punctual to the minute, the Masked Driver drove out of Fort Famine, and, having halted and closed his coach some miles out, he muttered to himself, as he again mounted to the box and drove on:

"Somehow, I feel as though something was going to happen on this trip, and my presentiments are seldom wrong, I have found by experience."

The presentiment felt by the Masked Driver kept him more on the alert than usual.

He had to halt a little longer at the first relay he came to, as one of the men had been kicked by a horse and was laid up, and another had gone on a hunt for game.

Reaching the Death's Cañon he let his horses walk as usual, and as he entered the open space was about to draw rein, when, suddenly, one, two shots rang out, and the Masked Driver fell back upon his coach as though shot through brain and heart.

Then, from among the rocks sprang two men, wearing masks, and, as they rapidly approached the coach, their weapons in their hands, suddenly and unexpected, without rising from his side, as he had fallen over on the box, the Masked Driver fired two shots.

There was no mistake this time, for the two masked road agents dropped dead in their tracks, a bullet through the brain of each.

Then the Masked Driver dismounted from his box, with no show of being hurt, approached first one man, then the other, and, raising the mask of each, glanced fixedly at the faces thus exposed.

He made no remark, but, mounting to his box, drove on once more, and still on the alert.

As he left the Death's Cañon he muttered to himself:

"My presentiment was right.

"Something did happen."

Driving up to the Relay Number Three, he was met by Foxey, who had heard the stage horn.

Foxey looked very disconsolate since his having been held up, and said:

"Waal, pard, through ag'in safe, I sees?"

"Yes, Foxey, but there have been two more sudden deaths in the cañon."

Foxey started and said:

"What! yer hed passengers kilt?"

"Oh, no, for I had no passengers; but I was fired upon; see, here is one shot through my sombrero and you observe this cut in my coat on my left side, where the bullets gave me a close call."

"The devil!"

"I told you that somebody would go under when they fired on me."

"Yer kilt them?"

"Yes, and left them lying in the cañon for their comrades to bury, for they must be near.

"As they wore masks, of course, I could not see who they were."

"Waal, I'll be darned!

"You do beat all I ever seen, Masked Pard."

"If you could scout back that way, Foxey, maybe you would see where their comrades buried them and find out who they are."

"I'll do it. I'll go at once, and report to yer upon yer next run through."

"All right; good-by," and the Masked Driver drove on.

He drove into Fort Rest ahead of time; but as calmly as though nothing had happened, and only when he had dismounted, said to Gill, the stage boss:

"Mr. Gill, come with me to Colonel Miles, for I have a report to make to him."

Gill was surprised, and all seeing him go to headquarters with the Masked Driver at once surmised that something out of the usual routine had happened.

"Well, Sir Unknown, you have news evidently for me, as I have for you," he said.

"I wish to report, Colonel Miles, that I was fired upon twice in Death's Cañon—see, here is one shot through my sombrero and here is another in my coat on the left side."

"What! you are wounded?"

"Fortunately, I was not, sir, but their intention was to kill."

"And you outran them with your team?"

"Oh, no, sir; I played 'possum, dropping over on my box as though dead, which brought them out of their hiding-places, and I shot them. I drove on, and told Foxey to scout back and see where their comrades buried them."

"I will send a party at once to the spot, and see."

"On the contrary, sir, please do not, for I wish to go right on to Trail End City to-night, with Mr. Gill's permission?"

"Why so?" asked Gill.

"I can only explain, sir, that an attack by redskins threatens the fort, and I brought out considerable treasure this time from Fort Famine, as well as valuable mail, so I desire to get it safe in Trail End City as soon as possible, for then I have several days off, before starting again."

"Yes, Gill, let him start."

"Certainly, sir."

"And, Mr. Gill, if you will kindly have the best team hitched at once to the coach, you will oblige me," said the Masked Driver, and the stage master started off to obey, while Colonel Miles said:

"I wish to tell you, sir, that the scouts send in word that the redskins are moving, villages and all, northward, so have given up their proposed raid, perhaps discovering we were prepared for them."

"No, colonel, that is a blind, I am sure, for they will halt their villages, and sweep around with the warriors to attack you in the rear, take my word on that, sir, and be more than ever on the alert."

"I will," was the colonel's emphatic response.

There was quite a stir in the fort when they saw the coach roll away toward Trail End City after a half-hour's halt, instead of waiting until the next morning.

"I can pass the second relay before dark, and reach Trail End City by midnight," mused the Masked Driver, as he went on his way.

He had gone about half a dozen miles when he suddenly caught sight of an object moving far ahead.

He fixed his eyes upon it, yet did not appear to notice it.

"An Indian, as I am a sinner, and hiding from me."

The coach rolled on as though nothing had been discovered by the driver to threaten danger, and when passing a little bush growing in a crevice of the rocks, the Masked Driver suddenly raised his rifle and fired.

A yell followed, and a redskin rolled over the rock to a grassy plot ten feet below.

Instantly putting on the brake, the Masked Driver leaped from his box and approached the Indian, who was writhing in pain.

"Suddenly he stopped and called out:

"What! is it my red brother, the Winnebago chief Many Hair?"

"Did my brother intend to kill me, for I am his paleface brother, the Healing Hand—see!" and kneeling by the dying redskin he held his face close down and raised his mask so that the eyes of the Indian alone could see it.

"My paleface brother speaks with a straight tongue—he is the Healing Hand, and he has killed

his red brother, the Many Hair," was the low reply, for the Indian was dying, and clutched his hand in his mass of waving hair, which was most strangely marked, as there were white, brown and reddish locks in it, hence his name.

"The Many Hair is here to kill my people, forgetting, since he left his own people and joined the Sioux, that he is the brother of the paleface. He is seeking to become a great chief among their people, and has come here to scout and lead them by night upon the forts, to kill and to rob. Is this the teaching of the Healing Hand to his red brother? Has his red brother forgotten all?"

The words moved the Indian greatly, even more than did the pain he suffered.

He was a splendid specimen of manhood, tall, muscular, and with a noble face.

After a moment of silence the Indian chief said, in a low, earnest tone, and in good English:

"The Many Hair is wrong.

"He has a bad heart to forget the teachings of his white brother, the Healing Hand. But he is dying, so can do no harm, for soon he will be upon the trail to the happy hunting grounds."

"The Many Hair can do good, he can make the heart of his white brother glad, for he can tell him of the red foes that are coming to kill his people."

Again the chief was silent for some minutes, and then he said:

"The Many Hair loves his white brother, and he will talk."

And, leaning close to him, the Masked Driver listened to all that the Indian, under his questioning, said to him.

The voice of the redskin grew fainter and fainter, and at last, with a convulsive start, his life was ended.

Instantly the Masked Driver arose, took up the form, as he might that of a child, and carried it to the coach, placing it in it.

Then, mounting to the box, he drove on in the gathering gloom until he reached the scene of Brighton's murder.

Then he halted and gave three long, shrill, ringing whistles.

They were answered promptly from near by, and a moment after a form appeared coming down the side of the hill.

The Masked Driver met the stranger, there was a short talk between them, and then the Indian was quickly stripped of his costume, and his hair cut short off to his head, while the body was wrapped in a blanket, the rig of the redskin and his weapons in another, which was tied up securely.

"Now, get your horse for me to ride back, while I dig a grave for poor Many Hair," said the Masked Driver.

The other disappeared, and when he returned, rid-

ing his horse, the grave was nearly dug in the soft ground.

"Now, you know, our plans agreed upon, so I will return at once to the fort," and mounting the other's horse, after strapping the blanket containing the Indian's outfit on behind, the Masked Driver rode rapidly back on the trail, his companion driving the coach toward Trail End City, and going at a very lively pace, too.

"Ho, Buckskin Charlie, what's up, thet you is drivin' ther old huss, and coming ter-night, when yer hain't due ontill ter-morrer?" called out one of the stockmen, as they came out to see what the coach had come by night for.

"Oh, the Masked Driver was shot at in Death's Cañon to-day, and, though he brought down his game, they hit him, too, so I'm driving this run."

"Oh, that's it; but why go through at night?"

"To catch the morning coach out of Trail End City, to send by it important dispatches."

"I see."

The fresh horses were soon hitched in, and away went Buckskin Charlie, the scout, driving with great skill, for he had driven stage before.

He passed the second relay, to the surprise of the stock tenders there, telling them the same story, and a few miles beyond halted and gave the same signal which the Masked Driver had given to call him.

The signal was promptly answered, and Buffalo Bill was the one who appeared.

"Ho, chief, I have news for you," cried Buckskin Charlie, as he sprang from his box, and the two held a conversation of some minutes together, when Buffalo Bill said:

"All right, Buckskin Charlie, I will meet him at the place named, and when you have left the coach at Trail End City, you go at once and notify Lieutenant Moore, and your own party, leaving one man in each camp, and coming with the others up to Precipice Pass."

"Yes, sir; we'll be there on time, never fear," responded Buckskin Charlie, and he drove rapidly on once more.

Just at midnight, the people of Trail End City were startled by hearing the coach dash up to the door of the Wayside Hotel, the only hotel there, and when Porter rushed out to see what one it could be, he cried, excitedly:

"The Fatal Coach! and Buckskin Charlie, the scout, driving it!"

This statement created a stampede for the door of the saloon, where many were gathered, drinking, gambling and chatting together, as inclination or circumstances prompted.

Pete Porter led Buckskin Charlie to the supper-room, where he had a substantial meal set before him, and which the handsome and dashing scout did

full justice to, telling the story of the Masked Driver's fight with the outlaws as he ate.

Then, his horses being ready, he went out to the stable yard to mount, and was soon going back over the trail, but which he branched off of before reaching the first relay, going to the left, and keeping up a brisk pace.

In the meantime, mounted upon Buckskin Charlie's horse, the Masked Driver had ridden with full speed back to Fort Rest.

He was challenged by the sentinel, but dismounted, and, advancing, showed him who he was, and was at once admitted, when he went to headquarters.

The colonel sent the orderly to tell him to come right in, and, as he entered, said:

"Ho, my masked friend, have you been fired upon again?"

"No, colonel, I did the firing this time, and I came back to tell you something of great importance."

The colonel saw that the mysterious man was in deep earnest, and said:

"Sit down, and let me hear what you have to say."

"Well, sir, it was fortunate that I decided to go on to-night, for I saw a man skulking on the trail, and discovered that it was an Indian in hiding."

"An Indian?"

"Yes, sir, and I knew that he must be a scout, so I pretended not to have seen him, watched his hiding-place, and, as I passed, fired at random."

"Before he could fire upon you?"

"He had no such intention, sir, for he was after bigger game."

"Ah!"

He was mortally hit by my bullet, and, springing from the box, I ran upon him, revolver in hand, when I recognized him as a Winnebago Sioux, my red brother, as he called himself. He had left his tribe and gone to the Sioux, and, hoping to win fame and position among them, he had urged them to allow him to plan the campaign against the forts.

"So his plan was to go northward with the villages to a stronger position, a few miles above, and then, leaving them, to circle around, come down through Precipice Pass, and rush upon Fort Rest at dawn, day after to-morrow morning."

"This is great news, sir, and you surprise me. You believed him?"

"Yes, sir, wholly. I got from him that the Cheyennes were leading, the Sioux supporting, for, after the attack upon Fort Rest, they were to lead upon Fort Famine. There are a thousand Cheyennes, and twelve hundred Sioux warriors, and they are all mounted upon picked ponies and well armed. They felt sure, or knew, that you had no scouts in the direction of their coming, and filing through Precipice Pass, they can be upon you two hours after, and they have ponies carrying long poles and rawhide ladders."

for the Cheyennes to creep up and mount the stockade walls with, open the gates and have the Sioux charge in upon their ponies."

The colonel's answer was a long whistle that expressed much.

"It is, indeed, a well-planned attack, sir, and your red brother shows that he is a very skillful general. If carried out, a thousand Indians making their way in the early dawn up to the stockade, they would hardly be seen by the sentinels until too close to keep them off, and the result is appalling to think of, should the Sioux charge into the fort twelve hundred strong on horseback.

"But continue, sir, with what else you have to say?"

"I remained with the Many Hair until he died, sir, and then decided upon my plan, for I had asked him many questions to aid me in a certain idea I had formed for action."

"Some daring move upon your part, doubtless."

"It is dangerous, just in so far as the part is badly played. The Many Hair got his name from a very remarkable birthmark, for his hair is several colors, in distinctly divided patches, or tufts. It is snow-white in one tuft, black as jet in the back of the head, and has a yellow and brown tuft as well. He was so proud of it that he never wore a headdress; other than a beaded band about his head without feathers. Now, he is just my size, and his features were regular, so that I can impersonate him to perfection, for I cut his hair off, and to-night shall sew it into the beaded band he wore about his head, and which I brought, with his clothing and weapons, with me. His horse is staked out, he told me, not very far from where I shot him, and I will go and get him."

"Yes, I see your intention now. But about the language of the redskins?"

"I speak both the Cheyenne and Sioux languages perfectly, Colonel Miles."

"You will take a terrible risk."

"Not near so much as you imagine, sir, and let me tell you that to-morrow Buffalo Bill will be here."

"Ah! you have seen him, then?"

"After the death of Many Hair, I drove on to a rendezvous, the spot where Brighton was killed, and a signal brought Buckskin Charlie to me.

"I told him what had occurred, ordered him to drive the coach on to Trail End City, while I returned to the fort.

"He was also to meet Buffalo Bill on the trail and have him go to a certain point to meet me, and I shall see him there at dawn, for he will help me make up as Many Hair. I am sure that Buffalo Bill will urge, as I do, sir, that the fight need not be here at the fort, but at Precipice Pass, where you can work your guns and ambush your infantry, having your cavalry in the rear to charge when the stampede begins. They can retreat but one way, and will doubtless at-

tempt a stand at a point miles beyond, but they will find that already occupied, I promise you, sir."

"You talk like a soldier, sir."

"Thank you, colonel; it is my ambition to be a good soldier."

"I know this Precipice Pass well, and it is the very place for an ambush, as you say. I can send word to Major Dean to-night to forward his cavalry to me here, with all haste, bringing one light gun, and, with my force, we can press the redskins hard, for I will have fresh horses for Dean's men. I need have but a small force in the fort, and, if we are not as successful as we expect, we can retreat upon the fort, and, warned as we are, the Indians would never dare attack us when prepared for them.

"Is that your idea of it, Sir Unknown?"

"It is, sir. Will you send a courier at once to Fort Famine?"

"I will send him so that he can reach Death's Cañon by dawn, for I hardly know a man who would go there at night, other than yourself and Cody, and he can get a fresh horse at the stage relay beyond, and reach Fort Famine by breakfast time."

"That will give the cavalry time to get here before sunset, when, with fresh horses and a short rest, they can go to Precipice Pass to join your force, sir."

"Yes; but do you go to-night?"

"Yes, sir; as soon as I have gotten some things from Cody's cabin, I shall return."

"Well, Sir Unknown, I must tell you that you have rendered most valuable services, and I fully appreciate them; but what will you say to the redskins when you meet them?"

"I shall lead them, as Many Hair, the chief, into the ambush you prepare for them, sir, for they need a very severe lesson, not seeming to have profited by the one you gave them a short time ago."

"But look out for yourself, for that pass will be a hot place, and bullets show no favors."

"Oh, I'll look out for myself, sir," was the laughing reply, and, twenty minutes after, the Masked Driver was on the trail to his rendezvous with Buffalo Bill, again mounted upon Buckskin Charlie's horse.

Half an hour later a scout started for Fort Famine with dispatches for Major Dean.

CHAPTER X.

THE MEETING OF THE PARDS.

When the Masked Driver arrived at the spot where he had shot Many Hair, he branched off to the right, and after a short search in the darkness, found the Indian's horse staked out in a hollow.

He gathered up the saddle and bridle, and taking the horse in lead, rode on to the place appointed for his rendezvous with Buffalo Bill, and to which spot he had told Buckskin Charlie to send him.

He met the scout and they went over their plans together.

The story of Many Hair's death and the Masked Driver's scheme was told, and then the two pards turned in for the night.

After several hours' sleep they awoke refreshed, got breakfast, and then sat down to discuss the plan for the day and night.

With the skill of a seamstress the Masked Driver sewed the long, variegated locks of hair cut from the head of Many Hair, into the beaded band, and placing it upon his own head, it looked, even by daylight, like his own hair.

While he was doing this, Buffalo Bill got out several little bottles the Masked Driver had brought with him, and which contained dark-red liquids.

These were small boxes of paints, some brushes and other things to make up the full-dress toilet of a chief out on the warpath.

The clothing of Many Hair was looked over carefully and tried on, and his weapons were put in good shape.

The weapons of the Masked Driver were placed on the saddle of Buckskin Charlie's horse, and, looking well ahead, the unknown man had, though with great repugnance, taken the scalplock of the dead chief, for his intention was to carry the scout's horse with him, and pretend to have killed him and captured the animal.

Of course, the scalp would carry him out in this, for a yellow lock had been taken that would look as though coming from a paleface's head.

"Now, pard, I will paint you," said Buffalo Bill, and, with the liquids, paints and brushes, he began his artistic work, the Masked Driver having shaved his face clean for the operation.

The work took nearly two hours, but was most artistically done, and when the Masked Driver, clad in the costume of the Indian, mounted the redskin's pony, he did look the counterpart of Many Hair himself.

Then the two pards shook hands warmly in parting, and, with the horse of Buckskin Charlie in lead, the Masked Driver started northward on his perilous mission, his clothing and mask being rolled in a blanket and strapped behind his saddle.

"There goes as brave a man as ever drew the breath of life," said Buffalo Bill to himself, as he stood watching the disguised man ride away.

Then he leaped into his own saddle, put spurs to his horse, and said:

"Come, old boy, it is a ten-mile ride to the fort, and you have got to make it in an hour, so do not tarry the way."

It was a few minutes under the hour when Buffalo Bill was ushered into the presence of Colonel Miles, for the chief of scouts knew how to ride hard and care a horse at the same time.

He saw Colonel Miles, and told him that the Masked Driver had started for the redskin camp disguised as Many Hair.

"My unknown pard, or as you called him, my shadower, is the man to play the game to the end and win," he added.

"I am most glad to hear you say so."

"He got the whole thing from the dying Many Hair as to just what he was to do, the names of the chiefs and all necessary information and when he was to meet them."

"What will he tell them, Cody?"

"That he has scouted about the fort, played the friendly Indian dodge, killed the white scout sent with him, and all is serene on this side of your position, with no barrier between them and the attack. He will send them off through Precipice Pass in just time for them to reach the fort before dawn, should they continue on, and you will get them into a trap, sir, which will completely demoralize them. In retreating they would take position to check pursuit in the Eagle's Cliffs, but Lieutenant Moore and his four soldiers, Buckskin Charlie and five of the scouts, and the Masked Driver and myself will be there to drive them back and hasten them on in their flight."

"A very small force, Cody."

"I wish to get a couple of dozen repeating rifles, sir, with ammunition, to carry with me, and that, with what we have with us, will give each man three guns, or forty-eight shots each, and that will make the redskins believe we have considerable force stationed there. Then, too, a dozen men could hold the Eagle's Cliffs against hundreds."

"You and your unknown, Cody, have certainly planned well. You shall have the guns and ammunition. But when do you start?"

"Very soon, sir, for we must get into position before nightfall."

Buffalo Bill went away from Fort Rest leading a heavily-laden pack horse, for he carried the extra rifles, ammunition and provisions for his party.

He rode as rapidly as he could, and came to the Precipice Pass while the sun was yet an hour high.

The pass was narrow from the fact that it was nothing more than a split, a chasm, dividing the mountain, with lofty precipices upon either side, and not over a hundred yards in width.

The center arose into a hill, and beyond this the walls narrowed and were broken, so that infantry could find lodgment on either side, the guns taking up position on the ridge, and commanding the narrow pass for a mile or more.

At the entrance to the pass, Buffalo Bill was confronted by Lieutenant Moore and Buckskin Charlie, who were awaiting him.

"Well, Cody, this is the scene of ambush," called out Lieutenant Moore, a handsome young officer

who had won his spurs over and over again as an Indian fighter.

"Yes, sir, and the general is going to bring every man he can spare. But let us ride on to our position, as it will be best to take a view of it by daylight."

It was just sunset when they came to Eagle's Cliffs, a spur of the mountain, around which the trail ran in half a circle, and with a river beyond the trail.

From the position the chief of scouts led them to, they could command the retreating force coming around the spur and after they had passed it for some distance.

They climbed up to their position, and had a long enough look by daylight to take in all its advantages.

The extra guns were unpacked, loaded, and each man was given two in addition to his own.

The horses were securely muzzled to prevent their betraying them by neighing, and the men ate supper and took up the positions assigned to them, while Lieutenant Moore, Buffalo Bill and Buckskin Charlie themselves went on duty to watch, letting the men sleep.

Meanwhile, the Masked Driver was playing a very bold part.

He rode on his way, leading Buckskin Charlie's horse, which bore his weapons, close at hand, if there came need to use them, and, upon coming near the Precipice Pass, he saw two redskin scouts awaiting him.

"Now comes the test, and I hope there are no more.

"Ah! I recognize one of those bucks as Fighting Elk, though he is young now.

"He is a Sioux, and the other is a Cheyenne.

"If they recognize that I am not Many Hair, then there will be two Indians booked for the happy hunting grounds."

As he drew nearer, the pretended Many Hair called out:

"Why did the Fighting Elk and his Cheyenne brother come ahead on the trail when he knew that the Many Hair was here, that he did not wish the scouts to come?"

"The Fighting Elk was looking for scalps," was the sullen reply.

"See, the Many Hair has a paleface scalp at his belt, and a horse and weapons.

"The Many Hair knows what is good for his adopted people, for the braves on the warpath.

"Let my brothers come back with me to the waiting braves, and to-night there will be hundreds of scalps to take.

"Let them go on, and they will spoil all.

"The Many Hair knows."

The Fighting Elk and the Cheyenne were pleased with the sight of the scalp, the horse and the weapons, and the promise of the Many Hair, and so they

turned back with him, happy in anticipation of what the night would bring forth for them and their red comrades.

Back around Eagle's Cliffs they went, and there they found two other Indian scouts, who were also turned back.

Some miles away from Eagle's Cliffs, hiding away in a valley, were the combined Sioux and Cheyenne forces.

The scene was a strange one, for the ponies were staked out in straight rows, from one end of the valley to the other, and by each horse a brave lay upon his blanket, or sat smoking his pipe or looking to his arms.

There was a shallow stream in the center of the valley, the Cheyennes being upon one side, the Sioux on the other.

There were at the head of the valley half a hundred chiefs of both tribes, all in consultation and patiently awaiting the return of the Many Hair, who was to lead them to certain victory, for they had confidence that he could do so.

The disguised man had so timed his arrival as not to run the gauntlet of more eyes than were necessary in the daytime.

He arrived just as the twilight was falling, and it was dark when he rode up to the group of chiefs.

A glance at the valley as he came in sight of it convinced him that the Many Hair had told the truth, that he had not overestimated the number of either Sioux or Cheyennes.

Pawnee Killer was the head chief of the Sioux, and Single Eye, a much-scarred redskin veteran, was the big man among the Cheyennes, and the former the pretended Many Hair had seen before.

Riding up to them, he dismounted, saluted in the Indian fashion, and calmly pointed to the scalplock and horse of Buckskin Charlie as evidence that he had been within the lines of the palefaces.

He told them that he had been to the fort, as a friendly Indian, and had counted the soldiers, the horsemen (the cavalry) and the big wagon guns (artillery), and that the fort had not over four hundred braves to defend it.

He had seen but one paleface scout in the direction they were going to the attack, and his scalp hung at his belt.

He would guide the red warriors through the Precipice Pass, where they could halt for rest, then move on toward the fort, and attack it just as the day was brightening.

The two chiefs listened to him with delight.

At last the Sioux were going to avenge themselves upon the whites, and the Cheyennes could kill and rob, to repay them for the sorrows they had known.

The sub-chiefs were called together and the movements made known, how the Cheyennes were to lead

all march to the Precipice Pass, halt for a rest, and then move on to the fort.

Arriving near, the Cheyennes were to leave their horses, the scale ladders were to be taken on the shoulders of two braves, and the band were to creep upon their unsuspecting foes, climb the stockade wall, seize the big guns, open the gates and in would rush the mounted Sioux.

It was a grand scheme, and after the arrival of the supposed Many Hair, supper was had, and an hour after the word was given to move, and as silent as specters the red warriors started upon their red mission of death and destruction.

It was an ordeal of deep suspense, when the little party upon the Eagle's Cliffs knew that the head of the Indian column was right beneath their position.

They held a place which, if the Indians, when defeated, could get possession of, they would be able to keep their stronghold there as a constant menace to the forts.

For in that position the redskins could retreat along the ridges, or could camp in the cañon and valleys beyond, so its importance can be readily realized by the reader, as a flank movement upon them would leave the enemy between the soldiers and the fort.

Thus was it most important to hold the Eagle's Cliffs, and it was a gallant little band of thirteen who had thrown themselves there.

Should the Indians take possession of the stronghold upon their march to attack the fort, then the fight must at once be precipitated, for the defenders would beat them back, and, the alarm thus given, Colonel Miles and his force must hasten on to the attack and hurl the redskins back.

It would be thus a fierce battle in the valley, with the soldiers opposing an overwhelming force.

So all anxiously awaited the movements of the Indians.

A dark, silent mass of horsemen, they filed by around the spur.

Above them the little band sat ready for the fray, their rifles ready at hand, the horses securely muzzleled and not a word being spoken.

As there was only one way of reaching the position, on the side toward the Precipice Pass, the defenders were all in view there.

If a retreat began, then they could divide their force and fire down upon the heads of the Indians from the other side of the spur.

On went the huge black column, not a word being uttered, and the muffled tread of two thousand Indian ponies the only sound that reached the ears of the watchers.

To those on the cliff, they looked like some mighty black serpent winding its way along the valley.

As the rear of the column passed, the suspense grew greater, for from that end would come those

who were to take the cliffs, if it had been decided to do so before the retreat.

But, no, the Indians thought not of defeat, they did not intend to return by so long a way to their fastnesses.

They would go on through Precipice Pass, strike Fort Rest, sweep down the stage trail to Fort Famine, overwhelm that, and return across the country to their villages, laden with plunder, having hundreds of horses, many women and children captives and many scalps of soldiers and scouts.

It was a well-planned raid and must not miscarry.

So the dark column, three miles in length, passed on, and the watchers gave a sigh of relief, for that meant a surprise for the redskins, an ambush which placed them on a more equal footing with the numbers that had to oppose them.

It meant their being hurled back from the pass, a stampede of maddened braves, a howling, vengeful mass of humanity, a rally at the cliffs to try and retrieve the day, a desperate fight there, and either death to the defenders or a splendid victory, for there, too, would the Indians meet with a surprise, almost as great as the first.

The column began to close up its ranks as it neared the Precipice Pass.

There was to be a halt in the pass for rest, to water their ponies and give the braves a chance to make a midnight supper of cold buffalo meat, before the ride began on the other side of the range for Fort Rest.

A hundred ladders, two poles lashed together with rawhide, so that they could be readily placed against the stockade walls, were carried on the backs of ponies, and up these, over into the fort, half a thousand Indian warriors could climb in a couple of minutes, the guards could be cut down, the gates thrown open, the big guns seized, and before the surprised garrison had realized what was going on, the mounted Sioux, twelve hundred strong, could rush in and join their thousand Cheyenne allies, and the massacre would begin.

With such anticipations of bloodshed and plunder ahead of them, it was not to be wondered at that the marching column of redskins should be happy.

"The head of the column must be near the pass now," said Buffalo Bill to Lieutenant Moore.

"Yes; we will not have long to wait," was the answer.

"Hark to that!" cried Buckskin Charlie, and a roar that shook the hills and echoed among the cliffs like the discharge of a thousand heavy guns told that the redskin column had marched into the ambush of Colonel Miles.

Colonel Miles was as serene as a May morn while waiting for the struggle to come.

A gallant officer, a man who had faced death on many a field, a tried and able soldier, nothing disturbed him when duty called.

He had placed his guns across the pass on the ridge and his infantry, over three hundred rifles, were stationed among the rocks upon either side in the rear of the artillery, and some of the men fifty feet above it.

Back in the valley, out of sight, were the cavalry, the men standing by their horses ready to mount, but holding their heads to prevent a neigh when the Indian ponies came near.

"I cannot but fear for Moore, Cody, and their men, they are so few," the colonel remarked to Captain May, who stood by his side.

"I hope, sir, in the stampede that must come, the redskins will not think of taking possession of the Eagle's Cliffs, and then the fire of our people there will but drive them on the faster in their flight," answered the captain.

"I trust so.

"But then there is that gallant fellow, the Masked Driver, for he is exposed to the most desperate danger."

"Somehow, Colonel Miles, I believe that man has a charmed life," replied Captain May.

"It surely looks so; but see, is that not some one coming up the hill?"

"Yes, sir, a scout."

It was Arizona Bob, and he came on at a trot, and silently, up to where the colonel stood leaning on the muzzle of a gun.

"They are coming, sir."

"You saw them, Arizona Bob?"

"Yes, sir; they are not a quarter of a mile away."

"Well, we are ready for them."

"Put the canvas up, men."

A long piece of canvas was stretched across the cañon, from gun to gun, so that when the Indians came up the hill it would look like the summit line, whereas the guns and men, relieved against the sky, would stand out in bold relief.

Then there was not a sound heard, and Colonel Miles, Captain May, several aides, with Arizona Bob and a couple of scouts, took position upon one side among the rocks, but where they could see through the pass when the fight began.

The low rumble of the hoofs grew louder and louder, and soon after the dark mass of redskin humanity was visible coming up the rise in the center of the pass.

A whispered order from the colonel and the canvas blind was suddenly let fall, and loud rang out the command in the commandant's voice:

"Fire!"

There were seven bursts of flame from the top of the ridge, illumining the pass a long distance off, and revealing the mounted warriors looking ten times their number in the first glance at them.

"Now the infantry! Fire!" commanded Colonel Miles, and three hundred rifles flashed forth, sud-

denly, a leaden hail into the crowded mass of braves and ponies, among whom the bursting shells from the guns were playing sad havoc.

One long, loud wail, rather than a war cry, and the redskin column surged backward, and then the retreat began, with a few random shots back at their foes.

The shells of the guns were sent after them for the half-mile they were in range, and then the cannons were drawn to one side, for the order had gone forth for the cavalry to charge.

Captain May had hastily mounted, for he was to lead the troopers, and with the rattling of steel and cheers the mounted men swept by the guns to pursue the terrified redskins.

Down the hill they thundered, and soon the crackling of carbines and revolvers was heard, demoniac yells mingling with the cheers of the troopers.

Then there was a lull, broken by a loud volley far in the distance, and the colonel shouted:

"Bravo! Moore and Cody are at it!"

"This night the Indians will long remember!"

The rattling of rifles on Eagle's Cliffs sounded as though a regiment was stationed there, and then, as it died away it told that the stampeded warriors had swept on by.

Fainter and fainter in the distance sounded the firing, and then Arizona Bob, splendidly mounted, was sent to recall the troopers.

Arizona Bob, with his scouts, was then to slowly follow the retreating army of redskins, and see that they returned to their fastnesses in full force, excepting those left upon the field.

Then over the valley, strewn with dead, came Captain May and his troopers in the early morning light, and he reported that the Indians had attempted to seize Eagle's Cliffs, but had been beaten off by the terrible fire of the little band of defenders, who, when he returned, had all mysteriously disappeared.

"They have not come here, so where are they?" asked the colonel, anxiously.

That was a question no one could answer.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASKED DRIVER REAPPEARS.

The ambush had dealt a bitter blow to Sioux and Cheyennes alike.

Precipice Pass was strewn with dead braves and ponies, and as far as the guns had sent their shells the fallen warriors lay, either slain or wounded, the horses near them.

Then there was a space that was clear of dead, except here and there where a wounded brave or pony had fallen, and the spot where the cavalry had struck them was plainly visible.

Piled up on the steep path leading up to Eagle's Cliffs the dead lay thick.

There were heaps of slain warriors here, and no better evidence could be found of how the little band had done their duty.

There were scores of Indian warriors captured, and these were made to take their wounded on *travois*, their ponies being given them for the purpose, and start for their villages, after the army surgeons had dressed the wounds of the unfortunate redskins.

No prisoners or wounded Indians were wanted at Fort Rest, for there was no accommodation for them, and in returning them to their people Colonel Miles was doing an act of humanity.

The dead Indians were decently buried in the valley, while the dead and wounded soldiers, for there were a number of each, were borne back to the fort, where there was great rejoicing over the victory, though tinged with sorrow for the slain.

The troopers from Fort Famine went back to their post, having won laurels by their gallantry, and to tell how the battle had been won with five to one against them, and that it was thought a long peace with the redskins would follow the severe blow they had received.

The third day after the battle the fort had settled down to the even tenor of its way, the dead officers and soldiers had been buried, the wounded were being well cared for, and yet a cloud hung over all, for, since the day of battle, neither Lieutenant Moore or Buffalo Bill, or the men with them, had been seen.

Then, too, not a word had been heard by Colonel Miles of the Masked Driver.

He had certainly done his part, for he had led the Indians into the trap, which they had intended to spring upon their white foes.

He had, with Buffalo Bill, saved the fort from a surprise, perhaps from a massacre of its people.

The afternoon of the third day following the fight in the mass, the sentinel startled all in the fort by calling out that the coach from Trail End City was in sight.

"Who was the driver?"

That was the natural question of all.

Nearer it came, and the officer of the day, having run up into the watch tower with his field glass, electrified all by the cry:

"The Masked Driver is on the box!"

Cheer after cheer went up, for it had become known what a part he had played in the Indian raid, and he was thought by many to be dead.

But, no, it was surely the Masked Driver, for he swept into the fort in his accustomed way, drew rein at the station, bowed courteously to the applause he received and said:

"Mr. Gill, no passengers this trip, but express packages and mail, a considerable of it going to Fort Famine."

His manner was cool as ever, and after a few words with the stage boss he went directly to headquarters.

The colonel grasped him warmly by the hand and said:

"I really believed you were dead, my masked friend."

"Why should you, colonel?"

"You never reported after going into the Indian lines as the chief, Many Hair, and after the battle Buffalo Bill, Lieutenant Moore and those with them mysteriously disappeared."

"Well, sir, I saw no reason to report, for, after playing Many Hair's part successfully, I set the redskins on the march for the pass, slipped out of the line and went to Eagle's Cliffs, where I was in the fight with those there."

"Then, as we were upon a special secret duty, we went back to our forts, and I reported at Trail End City in time to bring the coach through, sir."

"And Lieutenant Moore and Cody?"

"Are all right, sir, and I came to tell you that this run of the coach will, I hope, sir, reveal the secret of the mysterious murderers."

The Masked Driver held a long conversation with Colonel Miles that evening, and it appeared to be a most satisfactory one to the commandant.

The battle was talked over, and full credit given by the colonel for the part the Masked Driver had played in it.

Leaving the colonel's quarters, he went to his cabin as was his wont, and reappeared only when it was time to take the coach out on the morrow.

He bowed right and left to his enthusiastic admirers, receipted for the express packages and mail for Fort Famine, mounted to the box and was away, followed by a roar of cheers.

He went through the same tactics as before, of dismounting at the creek, getting into the coach, closing it up and driving on once more.

Then he halted at Relay Number Three and had a talk with Foxey about the great fight with the Indians.

"Whar was you, pard?" asked Foxey.

"I was keeping dark about that time."

"But tell me, Foxey, what about those dead men?"

"They say there were a heap of 'em kilt."

"No, I mean the men I killed in Death's Cañon, and you went down to see about?"

"Oh, them!"

"Why, I seen 'em take off ther dead."

"The outlaws?"

"Yas."

"Were there many of them?"

"I seen five."

"Well, five won't last long if they hold me up again."

"No, I guesses not."

"But I hopes yer'll git through safe."

"I hope they will hold me up, Foxey," was the re-

ply, as the coach rolled on, the driver arriving at Fort Famine ahead of time.

The next morning the coach left Fort Famine at a good pace.

Within fifteen minutes' drive of Relay Number Two the coach came to an abrupt stop, however, in a lonely part of the road.

Then from the Masked Driver came a signal, three sharp whistles, and, a moment after, men were seen coming from among the rocks upon a ridge.

Those who came down the ridge were Buffalo Bill and five scouts. They hastily clambered into the coach and it started off again.

Fifteen minutes after, the driver blew his stage horn, and when he dashed up to the cabin, Murdock and his two companions were there to receive him, the fresh horses all ready.

"Murdock, I wish a word with you," and the Masked Driver got down leisurely from the box and, turning suddenly, called out, as he thrust a revolver into the man's face:

"Hands up! for you are my prisoner!"

At the same instant the two doors of the coach flew open and out leaped Buffalo Bill and his scouts, revolvers in hand.

Giant George, one of the stock tenders drew his revolver and fired at Cody, but his aim or the sudden alarm and excitement, was not as true as his usual record, while Buffalo Bill's bullet pierced the big ruffian's breast.

Sykes, the other stock tender, started to run, but in an instant was caught by the scouts, and the two prisoners and the body of Giant George were placed in the coach.

Two of the scouts remained at the relay to look after the stage horses until they should be relieved.

Buffalo Bill and his other men now got into the coach and the Masked Driver went on for the next relay, passing through Death's Cañon without a halt.

As they neared the station loud rang the stage horn, and dashing up to the door, the Masked Driver called out:

"Hoop-la, Foxey! here I am again, and I've got a message for you, too."

With this he dismounted while the stable men were looking to the changing of the teams.

As he approached Fox, he turned him one side, with his back to the coach, as though he had something of a secret nature to tell him, when at once the coach doors opened and out stepped Buffalo Bill and his men.

"Hands up, all around!" cried the Masked Driver, and, to the consternation of Foxey and his men, they were all covered with the deadly little guns.

One showed fight—Bloden—but he was promptly shot by Buffalo Bill, while Knuckles and Bradley attempted to run, and the former fell, shot by one of the scouts, and the latter was quickly captured.

As for Foxey, he stood like a man who was dazed. His bronzed face now had the pallor of death upon it, and he made no move to resist, but muttered, after a moment:

"What does it mean, pard?"

"It means that you are the chief of the mysterious murderers, Foxey, and that we have run you to earth. Your other two stations will soon be in our power also."

"It's false!" roared Foxey.

But he was quickly and securely bound.

The Masked Driver, turning to Buffalo Bill, then said:

"Now, Cody, we will have a talk with Murdock."

The chief of scouts brought Murdock out of the coach and led him apart from the others.

"Murdock, I happen to know that you have been the man who has been kept by Foxey at the retreat, and, therefore, you have not been with the band when they have murdered and robbed the coaches. It is lucky for you that such is the case, for now you can save your life by leading us at once to the place where your booty is."

"I'll do it, pard, I'll do it!" was the eager response.

"First, tell me if there are any other guards there?"

"One, Sampson, who is a perfect giant, pard. It is he who watches with me."

"All right; we'll take care of Sampson as his name-sake of old did the Philistines," was Buffalo Bill's remark, and, leaving the other scouts on guard, he ordered Murdock to lead to the secret retreat.

To the surprise of the Masked Driver and Buffalo Bill he entered the cabin, caught hold of one end of two bunks that seemed fast to the wall, and, pulling them out, for the other end was hung on hinges, revealed the entrance to the cavern.

A lantern was there, and, lighting it, the two pards bade their prisoner move on.

It was a walk of fully two hundred yards, ascending as they went, and at last the guide whispered:

"We are near the end of the cavern, so I better call Sampson in here, pretending I want him to help me, for he's a devil and will never surrender."

"All right."

Then Murdock called out:

"Ho, Sampson, come and help me with a prisoner I has here, and be in a hurry, too."

"I is coming," cried a deep voice; and a moment later there appeared in the light from the other end of the cavern a form over six feet in height, and very powerful in build.

"Hands up, Sampson, or you die!" cried the Masked Driver.

A yell of fury broke from the man, and, quick as a flash, he fired.

The victim was not the two rescuers, but Murdock

who fell dead in his tracks, just as a shot from the Masked Driver brought down the huge outlaw.

Before he could rise, Buffalo Bill and the Masked Driver threw themselves upon him, and he was quickly manacled, for he was not seriously hurt, it was soon discovered.

When the two pards entered the space into which the cavern led them, after having firmly secured the prisoner, Sampson, and discovered that Murdock was dead, they found themselves in a perfect basin in the summit of the mountains.

It appeared to be the crater of some long-ago extinct volcano, for, an acre in size, its walls rose smooth and perfectly perpendicular to a height of over a hundred feet, the brink all around being fringed with trees.

And in this crater, or basin, there was a spring bubbling out of the wall of rock and flowing away into a crevice on the other side, a score of trees, bordering the tiny stream, and a long cabin close in under the overhanging cliffs.

This cabin was filled with plunder, chiefly gold dust, and a part of it was carried out to the coach.

Then, with his strange load, the Masked Driver started upon his way, Buffalo Bill calling out to him: "I will meet you there on time, pard."

"All right, Bill," was the answer, and the Masked Driver, in spite of the load he carried, now drove more rapidly along than ever before.

And such a load! for in the baggage rack behind were the bodies of Murdock and the two outlaws slain at the stations, and inside the coach was Foxey, the wounded man, Sampson, and the other three outlaws, all securely ironed. But when the coach drew rein at the station there was indeed a sensation, and when it became known that the Masked Driver had brought in as prisoners the mysterious murderers, the excitement was unbounded.

With the three captives under his charge, the Masked Driver went to headquarters, and the welcome he got from Colonel Miles can better be imagined than described.

Bright and early the next morning the coach started for Trail End City, the Masked Driver again on the box.

Though he had held a long conversation with Colonel Miles, he did not yet unmask, and had gone to his cabin early and remained alone, as was his custom.

Those who saw him start off in the morning knew that he had other work to accomplish, and felt that they would soon hear what it was, as the coach was to come back on the following day to keep up the old schedule, so many days having been lost by delays that it would then be all right, and the runs would be on original days.

When out some distance from Fort Rest the driver halted and gave a signal.

It was answered by the appearance of Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Moore.

After a few words together the two latter got into the coach, which was tightly closed, and the Masked Driver dashed on to Relay B. The three stock tenders came out, and making an excuse to get down from his box and a moment after, the three surprised outlaws were looking into the muzzles of the trio who had so suddenly demanded their surrender.

Rendered desperate by the discovery of their crimes, the three men resisted, and there were several shots fired.

"I was forced to kill my man," said Lieutenant Moore, coolly, while the Masked Driver remarked: "And but for the fact that this man's bullet flattened against my watch he would have killed me, for I was for once off my guard."

As he spoke he took from his vest pocket his watch in which the bullet had buried itself.

"A whack over the head with my revolver took the fight out of my man," Buffalo Bill said.

"Now to go on to Station A," said the Masked Driver, and, leaving the man killed by Lieutenant Moore in the cabin, and taking their two prisoners, the victors started on their way.

As they neared the relay, the Masked Driver called down to Buffalo Bill and Lieutenant Moore, who were in the coach:

"Buckskin Charlie has done the work, for he is there with his scouts."

As the coach halted there was Buckskin Charlie, and near him were three soldiers, with one prisoner in their keeping, while upon the ground lay a dead soldier and two stock tenders.

"They showed fight when I called upon them to surrender, sir, and so we had to have it out, for they killed Private Bowles, as you see, sir," said Buckskin Charlie, addressing Lieutenant Moore, who answered:

"The regret is that poor Bowles went under, and that the two you killed, Buckskin Charlie, escaped the gallows."

"That ends it, pard, for not one of the mysterious murderer has escaped us," said Buffalo Bill, and he added, still addressing the Masked Driver:

"Buckskin Charlie and one of the soldiers will go on back to Relay B, while the lieutenant and his men and I will wait your return here, so bring out two tenders for each station, and a driver, you know."

"Yes, don't forget the driver," called out Lieutenant Moore, as the coach rolled away.

There was the usual crowd to greet the coach upon its run into Trail End City, but little they suspected the happenings to the Masked Driver in the last two days.

Taking Porter into his private office, the Masked Driver told him all that had occurred, that Foxey,

who had selected the stock tenders for the four relay stations, and was their captain, was an outlaw himself and had picked out outlaws for the places.

He had then organized his band of cutthroats, and by going from station to station and never suspected, always being on foot to leave no trail, and cutting across country from Stations Number One and Two, he had had things all his own way, and so carried on his devilish work unchecked.

The next morning the crowd at Trail End City were surprised to see another driver on the box with the Masked Driver and eight men go as inside passengers.

Arriving at Number One two men were left there, and Lieutenant Moore, Buffalo Bill and the two soldiers were taken aboard, with the dead bodies in the rear rack and the prisoners on top.

At Number Two a couple more of the stock tenders were left, but here were the horses of the soldiers and scouts, and as Buckskin Charlie and the three troopers rode horseback, the coach was not overcrowded, but again created a stir when it rolled into Fort Rest with its load.

The testimony of the captives of the mysterious murderers had been taken by Colonel Miles, and the Masked Driver told his story.

"It was Buffalo Bill who played highwayman," he said, "and held up Foxey, the outlaw leader, getting from him the watch of one of the drivers slain, the ring of another, the wallet of a third and papers which alone would hang him, and he, with his scouts, and Lieutenant Moore, with his soldiers, have been in secret camps along the trail, have suffered hardships, have scouted day and night and ferreted out this mystery of Death's Cañon, for their testimony will be given to-day to Colonel Miles, and I have been but a means to an end in the good work, which will only be complete when those fiends have been hanged."

"You are too modest, my friend, about your own services."

"No, major, I am simply just."

"But we may now know who you are?"

"Yes, Colonel Miles, and pardon me for keeping the secret so long from you," and the Masked Driver removed his mask, and at once came the exclamation from Colonel Miles:

"What! Surgeon Frank Powell, of the army? You are the Masked Driver, then? I might have known it, from Buffalo Bill being in the secret, for you have been called his shadow, and he yours."

"Let me explain, Colonel Miles, that Buffalo Bill wrote to me up at Fort McPherson, where I am stationed, telling me of this mystery of the Overland, and asking my aid."

"Among my collection of curios and relics I happen to have an old armor of woven steel, the body doubly woven, and with skullcap, apron for the neck

and all. This I knew to be bullet proof, for I had tested it, so I brought it along, determined to take my chances in it of running the gauntlet of Death's Cañon. I made it still more secure by a rawhide armor of Indian make which I put over it, and the mask hid the steel over my face, the gauntlet gloves my mailed hands, so that only a chance shot in the eyeholes could kill or hurt me. Knowing this, Cody consented to my driving the coach, and by stopping, after leaving the forts and donning my armor, and by closing the coach, I was all right, with a great deal of bluster talk, for the outlaws were sure I had some trap to spring upon them, and really believed the coach was full of scouts. Lieutenant Moore and Buckskin Charlie were let into the secret and with the soldiers and scouts constantly watching the trails we were able to keep the outlaws still, until the two fired upon me that day in the cañon, and, but for my armor, would have killed me. The shots were fired by two men who stood guard at the retreat. Suspecting Foxey, Buffalo Bill held him up at the suggestion of Lieutenant Moore and myself, and you know the testimony of his guilt secured thereby. Now, Colonel Miles, I could not tell you my secret, knowing you would consider it your duty to order me at once back to McPherson, where I must go in a few days. As I have lived so much among the Indians, you know it was an easy thing for me to impersonate Many Hair.

"Such, sir, is my explanation."

To say that Colonel Miles could refuse to accept it would be to wrong that gallant officer, for he did accept it.

"That night the colonel sent a courier to Fort Famine with a letter to Major Dean, giving him the story of Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, as he had heard it.

After a few words more, the Surgeon Scout bade farewell to all and started upon his way back to Fort McPherson, Buffalo Bill having leave from Colonel Miles to accompany him, and he was also made the bearer of dispatches to the general commanding, giving a full report of the capture of the outlaw band known as the Mysterious Murderers of Death's Cañon.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 62) will contain: "Buffalo Bill's Still Hunt; or, Fighting the Robber of the Ranges." The Robber of the Ranges was a tougher proposition if anything than the mysterious murderers. Buffalo Bill's work was cut out for him when he tackled him, for the Robber of the Ranges had been keeping the whole country in the neighborhood of Pocket City in terror for years. How the great scout finally brought him to bay and captured him is a thrilling story. It will all be told in next week's issue.



THRILLING ADVENTURE

Hot weather, boys. Vacation time's coming in soon. Great fishing these days—so they say. Remember those fishing sets we offer as prizes. Remember how to get one. If you don't, look on page 32, then get to work.

A Thrilling Adventure.

(By Albert Bogart, Jr., New Jersey.)

One night, just after the Fourth of July, one of my friends asked me if I would go fishing with him, and some other fellows. I said I would, so that night we started out. We walked along the railroad track to North Paterson, where the trains stopped for water.

We hung around, waiting for the midnight freight, which arrived in due time, and we all piled in an open box car. When near our destination, we got ready to jump, when to our surprise the train increased its speed and we could not get off. Well, we made the best of our situation, and we decided to take a little ride. After riding for about three hours, we were passing another freight, and as our train had slackened up a little we decided to get off and get on the other freight, which was going past.

After the other fellows got off I was just about to get off, when our train started up again, so I had to stay in the car. I looked out of the car and saw that my friends had all got on the other train, so I was all alone, speeding over the rails at the rate of about thirty miles an hour.

I sat down in the corner of the car, and fell asleep. When I awoke, I found myself in Stroutsburg, Pa. It was now about 4:30 a. m., so I decided to get something to eat. After walking around for a while I started back for the railroad, to wait for a freight or coal train. I had to wait about three hours for one that was going toward home. When she came along I got on and rode for about six miles, when I was put off in the wildest region I ever saw. I decided to walk to the nearest station, and wait for another freight. So I started to walk along the track, and after walking about twelve miles, which I did in about five hours. I came to a place called Blairstown. Here I met a friend of mine, who was waiting for the freight, which was standing in the yard, getting up steam. My friend told me it was an express, which would leave at one o'clock p. m. When she started off we got on, and after riding for about twenty minutes it started to rain in torrents. We were

drenched to the skin in no time, as we were standing between two coal cars. As I was standing on the bunker holding on the two brakes, a flash of lightning struck the brake, and I felt an electric shock pass right through me. I tell you I felt pretty well scared, so I decided to get up in front, between two freight cars, as it was now getting quite dark, and we were drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone. I fell asleep while standing between the cars and I don't think I would be writing this story, if it had not been for my friend, who grabbed me by the collar, as I was falling between the cars.

After that I decided to get on the top of the car, which I did.

While I was sitting there I fell asleep and when I awoke I was lying home in bed with a few bruises on my head. When I asked how I got there the fellow who was in the room with me said that while the train was going around a bend I had rolled off. And a farmer who had seen the accident volunteered to take me home in his wagon. This was my first ride on a freight, and I think it will be my last, as I have had enough of it, and I know what enough means.

A Midnight Episode.

(By Bertie Ward, Massachusetts.)

Bang! crash! rumble! roar!

Everything was in confusion. The ground shook, dishes were broken, and the great glass windows in front of the village store were shattered into a thousand pieces.

I awoke with a start, thinking that the world was coming to an end. Leaping out of bed, I sprang to the window and looked out. Imagine my horror when I saw that the entire block was in flames, and I was just in time to see three heavily-built men, with masks on their faces, climbing out of a rear window, one carrying a satchel.

Grabbing my clothes, I ran down the stairs three at a time and out behind the burglars. On my way I came across my cousin Walt, who told me that they had blown

up the safe and the concussion had set off a few pounds of dynamite that had been stored away to be used on the electric road for blasting purposes.

We now joined an excited throng of men and boys, who were armed with sticks, stones, shotguns and pistols and were rushing pell-mell after the safe crackers who were about two hundred yards ahead.

We could plainly see that one of them was wounded and limped badly. They were making for Lake Whitehall, which was about a quarter of a mile to the east of the burning building.

Walt and myself were in the foremost ranks of the angry mob following Big Billy Brady, who posed as leader.

Shouting, yelling, swearing, we followed them.

By this time the crooks had reached the water and were rowing for dear life toward Sandy Island.

As there was no other boat near the excited men came down to the wharf and ran up and down the beach cursing roundly.

My companion and I made our way up the shore to Horseshoe Cove, where I had a canvas canoe named "The Merry" secreted.

Clambering into the frail craft and each seizing a paddle we proceeded to follow the cracksmen who were about a third of a mile ahead and rowing slowly. Undoubtedly they did not fear pursuit as theirs was the only boat on this side of the lake.

Paddling as silently as possible, we managed to keep them in view. Onward went pursuer and pursued.

The crooks rowed up to the eastern shore of the island and effected a landing. One picked up the satchel, which probably contained their booty, while the other helped his wounded companion.

Walt and I paddled around to the northern bank, where we succeeded in creeping ashore undetected.

Lying down behind an old sycamore log, we proceeded to watch the movements of the enemy.

As soon as they had landed they headed inland for about six hundred yards, where the fellow with the satchel paused before an old stump, stooped over and, to our amazement, lifted it up, revealing a dark cavity underneath, into which they disappeared. We had discovered their hiding-place.

Telling Walt to stay and watch them, I started back post-haste for help, taking their boat with me and towing my canoe.

An hour later I returned with twelve men, who surrounded the cave and called out for its inmates to surrender. After parleying a while, they gave in and came out of the hole.

On our return to the village Walt and I were hailed as the heroes of the hour.

The leader proved to be Handy Bill, a notorious criminal, with a reward on his head, which Walt and I received.

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